











REAR-ADMIRAL PELTIER

# SOVIET ENCOUNTER

by

REAR-ADMIRAL PELTIER

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## PREFACE

I SPENT over four years in the Soviet Union in my capacity as Naval Attaché to the French Embassy. During this period I sought to discover, in as calm and objective a manner as possible, the true nature of the people who surrounded me. I observed a great deal; I read; I also studied the basic texts of Soviet Communism. Whenever and wherever possible I travelled in order to view this country from the inside and to understand more fully the mind and behaviour of its inhabitants, now engaged in the task of creating a new world.

Upon my return to France I waited for the innumerable impressions I had gained to resolve themselves into truer focus and perspective. Behind those incidents which had tended to obscure the backcloth of the stage—the ups and downs of daily life, the spectacular parades, the Navy—I found the man: a man striving and suffering like the rest of us and, like us, with his moments of joy and hope; the same yesterday as today, who just goes on being true to his nature regardless of the political fluctuations about him.

The following pages do not claim to be a study of the Soviet Navy, nor a justification or condemnation of a political or economic system. They are intended as a description of those years which followed the Second World War and witnessed the rise to world power of Stalinist Russia, as seen through the eyes of a naval man. My aim has been simply to place my own evidence on record and to make this record available to others.



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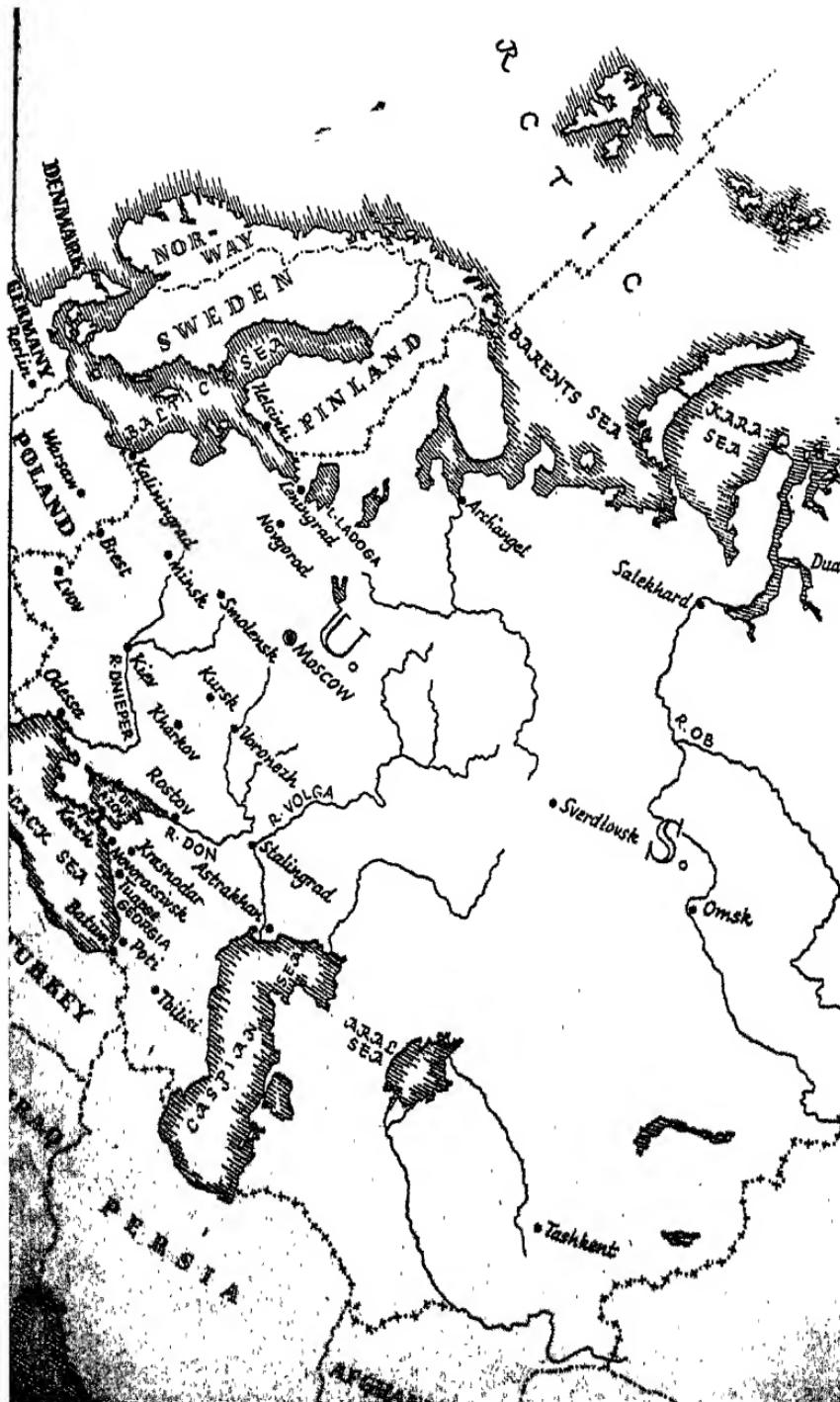
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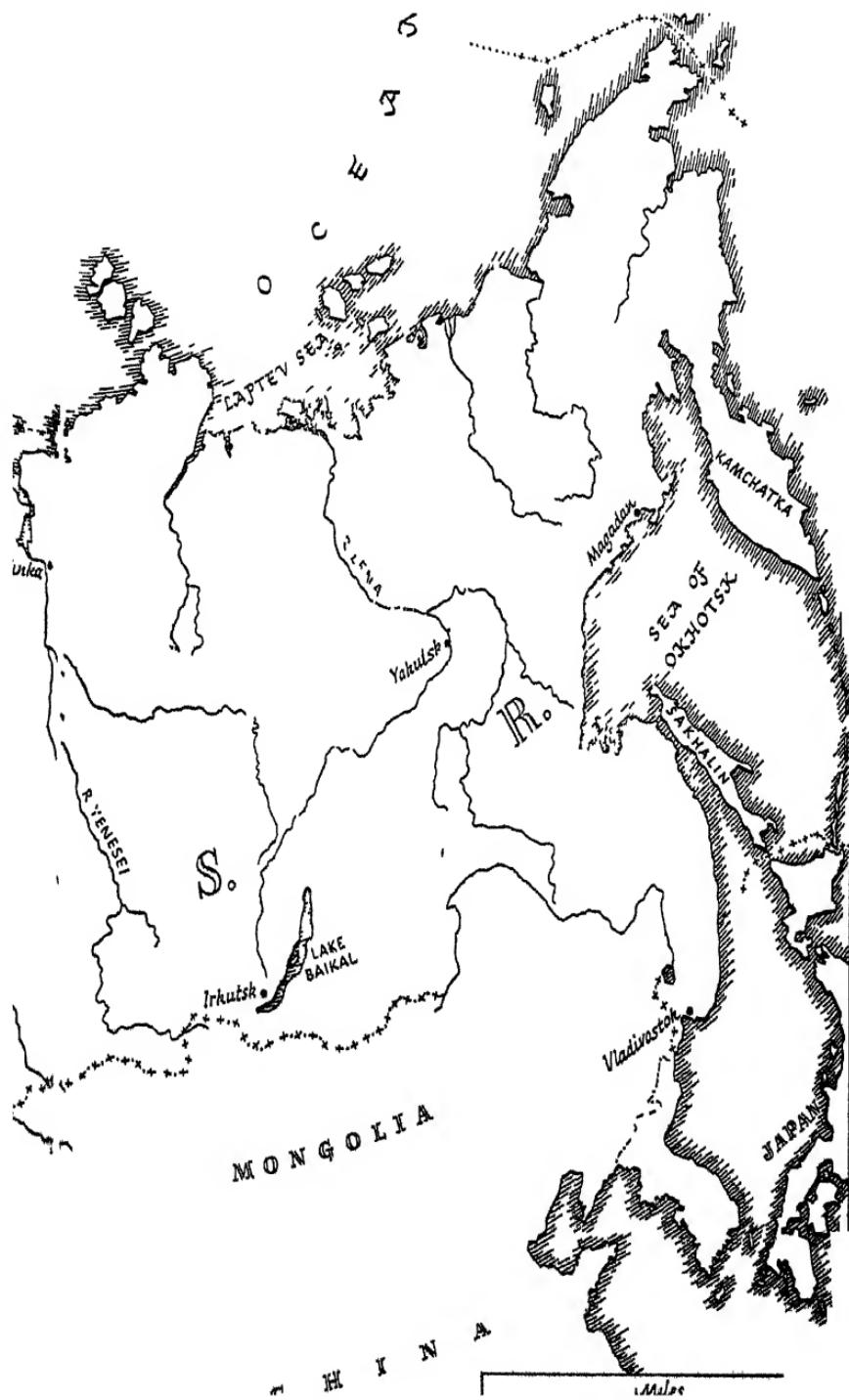
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## CHAPTER I

### First Encounter

MY first personal contact with Soviet sailors was in February, 1945, when I was sent by the French Admiralty to Lille to act as interpreter-guide to a Soviet Naval Mission recently arrived from London. They had come to inspect the Atlantic Wall and it was my task to conduct them over the submarine bases, dug-outs, blockhouses and other enemy installations from the front at Dunkirk (at that time still held by the Germans) and down as far as Le Havre.

They were all so earnest. They wanted to see everything, and yet everything made them uneasy. Apparently fearing that we were trying to conceal something from them and to assure themselves that the tour had not been in some way specially "rigged" for their benefit, they would demand sudden changes in the itinerary. This was something new to us, but I agreed readily to their requests and on the first occasion even laughingly assured them that they would not find a Trotskyite or soldier from Vlassov's army\* skulking in this, that or the other barn or fortification. When, however, I perceived that my innocent attempt at humour was little appreciated, I felt obliged to add that we just did not do things that way and were in the habit of playing square with our allies. Oh yes, it was all pretty earnest!

But in the mess at night they unbent and the whole party from Commander and Captain down gave themselves over to

\* General Vlassov was captured by the Germans and later organised an army to fight the Russians. He was eventually recaptured, tried and executed by the Russians.

the joys of French cooking, living for the moment, talking freely and openly, whilst in the background a group of young French officers could be heard singing "*P'tit Quinquin*."

We spent a good week in one another's company and at the end of this time relationships of a quite personal character had begun to form between us, based upon our common allegiance to the sea. I am convinced that the head of the mission was perfectly sincere when he confessed that his first contact with French people had reassured him and that his pleasure had been further increased by the fact that he had been received and entertained by sailors like himself. When we were taking leave of each other at Le Havre he added: "Come and visit us in the Soviet Union as a Naval Attaché. You speak Russian, you would understand the people, and be sure of a welcome. Do come, and if we happen to meet . . ."

I returned to Paris. Several weeks passed during which nothing occurred to remind me of this encounter until, with the idea of ensuring liaison with the Soviet and also with the British and American Navies, I was attached to a mission which was being sent to Germany (then on the brink of capitulation). Thus, at the beginning of July, I found myself flying to Berlin as a member of an advance party whose duties were to prepare the way for the French Control Commission.

After considerable fuss, talk and argument with both the Soviet and the Anglo-American authorities, our delegation managed to instal itself in the French Sector, near Lake Tegel, to the north-west of Berlin.

Our task was to implement decisions taken at the Potsdam Conference (although we French were not present at this) and to organise life in post-war Germany. First on our list were disarmament, de-nazification and the restoring of life to Berlin itself. Administrative machinery was set up in Berlin, consisting of the Control Council, presided over by the Zone Commanders themselves, and a Co-ordinating Committee, which was sub-divided into various departments such as Finance, Justice, Economic Affairs, Military Affairs, Navy

## FIRST ENCOUNTER

and so on. The organisation was well planned and well equipped and had only to be put into motion. Here, during the course of my Staff duties, I was once more brought into contact with the Soviet Navy; but first a curious incident occurred which led to my encountering not the sailors, but the soldiers of the Union.

One evening I was informed that a Soviet officer had met with a car accident whilst driving in the French Sector of Berlin (there were no traffic restrictions at that time); he was at present lying in the military hospital, where nobody had been able to understand a word of what he was trying to say. Moved as much by curiosity as by considerations of duty and charity, I went to see this man. I found that he was a doctor (with the rank of colonel); his condition was not too serious but he was going to need medical attention for several days yet. Although he was in good hands he behaved as if he felt himself to be in the grip of some evil enchantment and displayed an almost morbid fear of remaining any longer with us. He kept insisting that we should return him to his own Sector; but these were early days in Berlin, the telephone system had not yet been restored in the ruined city and it was practically impossible to get into touch with the Soviet Headquarters at Karlhorst, nearly twenty miles away. I told him that he would have to be patient, but he continued to fret and complain and make such a nuisance of himself that eventually I myself lost patience and agreed to drive him personally back to his people. We carried him out to the car.

We passed through the French and British Sectors without difficulty. Berlin was nothing more than a heap of rubble at that time with here and there a wall still standing. Some women were clearing the streets whilst others sat mutely, almost expectantly, amongst the ruins; children eyed us as we passed, but we saw very few men. We travelled as fast as the road surface would permit until suddenly there loomed up in front of us a young woman in Soviet uniform, waving a baton and directing the traffic. As soon as she saw my

companion she signalled me to pass and we moved forward into the Soviet Sector.

Almost at once I had that feeling of being "elsewhere." True, here also were the stones and rubble, the women who worked and the women who waited, but now also there were big blond-haired men and some others with slit-eyes. The sight of them carried me eastward to lands far distant—to Asia itself.

Here was barbed wire. Here also were horses harnessed in the traditional Russian style with the *duga*,\* and the driver perched nonchalantly to one side of the carriage, his feet dangling. On some waste ground, under a clump of trees, I could see a strange encampment, half roman, half military in appearance, with horses tethered to trees and men squatting or sprawling on the ground about the open camp-fires.

We finally pulled up at what appeared to be the injured man's billet, a reasonably intact building with some kind of placard outside. I called out and eventually a colonel appeared, yawning.

"Right," he said, "I'll give you a hand in with our friend here."

We entered the building. The ground floor was obviously unoccupied and my glance naturally turned to the staircase leading to the floors above.

"No, not up there," said our patient.

Then it had to be downstairs. We made our way down the steps and into the cellar. There, by the dim light afforded by two ventilators I could make out four beds and a chair. So these were living-quarters for four colonels! I could not hide my astonishment.

"What the devil does it matter!" said the colonel. "We're as well off here as anywhere else!"

The injured man flopped on to his bed, reached for a book which was lying about, and then, with an air of utter peace

\* An arch of wood which spans the shafts and through which the reins are passed and controlled.

and contentment and without another word, settled down to read. He put me in mind of a bird which had just regained its liberty and was all too ready to forget those pampered hours spent in a gilded cage. Nevertheless, I still felt uneasy on his account.

"But you're not going to leave him here—he should be taken to hospital!"

"*Nitchévo* ("No matter!"), we'll have to see about it."

A few days later I happened to meet the injured man's commanding officer and asked for news of the patient. He knew (or pretended to know) nothing of the incident, but at the same time thanked me most graciously for the part I had played. That was the last I heard of the matter.

After its first few meetings the Navy Directorate settled down quite amicably to procedural matters, but we French continued to be much exercised by another question. The war had imposed a terrible strain upon our naval and merchant fleets and we were anxious to obtain reparations from the German Navy. It had been agreed that this navy should be split up and allotted between the victorious Powers who had taken part in the Potsdam Conference: Great Britain, the United States and Soviet Russia. However, since France had not been present at Potsdam. . . .

At the beginning of August a British colleague informed me that a mixed naval commission was about to meet with representatives of the three beneficiary powers in order to consider this question of the German fleet. Great Britain had undertaken to speak for France. Our country's position—and my own in particular—had become a false one, but I informed the French general delegate of this development and proceeded to make repeated representations to both the British and American authorities in order to express our views and to let them know that the French Government would be following this matter with concern. The British admiral assured me most courteously that France would obtain her rights.

Accommodation in Berlin, which at first had been very

poor, gradually improved until we were living in comparative comfort. With this improvement came an increase in the size of the various delegations and a greater variety and pace in our daily life and work. There was an atmosphere of friendly co-operation between the various delegates and if, during the round of diplomatic calls, study-groups and parties, discussion became a little sharp at times, this did not appear to be due to any basic differences of opinion; we were all filled with grand and generous illusions.

I remember on one occasion dining with two Soviet naval officers, a Commander and the Captain of a corvette. In common with the sailors I had encountered on the Atlantic Wall they soon adopted an easy manner, and treated me to a clear and unassuming account of their wartime experiences in the Baltic. They talked also of the feelings current in their sector with regard to Germany and the Germans.

Soviet Russia had suffered terribly from the war and the German occupation and was determined to prevent a resurgence of German military power such as the world witnessed after the Treaty of Versailles. They were full of praise for the foreign policy practised by their country, claiming that it cared nothing for diplomatic subtleties and went straight to the heart of the matter. Of this quality I was soon to witness a striking example.

The Soviet naval officers had invited their colleagues from the other three delegations to supper at Karlhorst. A luxurious reception had been planned at the "White House" (their base); the table was groaning beneath an array of meat and fish dishes, sucking-pig, caviar and Caucasian wines—all imported from the Soviet Union. The prevailing mood passed from courtesy to cordiality and thence to joviality, until we had reached a point where we recognised in ourselves brother sailors united by the common traditions and heritage of the sea. We felt the sea drawing us together: it was as if an inner life and vision had taken hold of us all—British, Russians, Americans and French; our eyes scanned once more that

beloved wind-swept horizon, we felt the bridge drop away beneath our feet, heard the helmsman calling the soundings. . . .

Suddenly, the charm was broken. A Soviet admiral entered, followed by a general. Everyone rose to his feet and after a brief exchange of formal greetings the two newcomers made their way to where I stood with the chief of the French delegation. Without any preliminaries they informed us that the German fleet had now been allocated, that the Soviet demands had been met, and that we French would be well advised to remind the commission now sitting in Berlin of our own needs. In their opinion the Americans would make few claims, since they already possessed a huge fleet, and the British could hardly object to such a move since they had undertaken to protect our interests. So far there had been nothing unusual in all this, but the general now drew me aside, repeated what had already been said and then insisted that we should present our demands to the commission immediately, without, however, making any mention of the present interview. Then, before I could open my mouth to reply, he pulled out a paper, saying, "Here, sign this; it must be sent off tonight."

What was it all about? Friendly advice? But if so, how strange a way of giving it! I fear that it was more probably a scheme to place us French once more in a begging position, or to use us in order to embarrass the British and Americans. However that may be, I declined to sign this paper, despite the general's continued insistence, since I knew that Paris was already dealing with this question at the proper level. He was finally obliged to leave, complaining of what he chose to term my "lack of understanding."

We informed Paris of this development and a few days later received a message which announced the terms governing the disbanding of the German fleet. We saw that France had not been forgotten.

From this incident, however, I felt able to draw a moral: ~~"Sign nothing, not even in the rosee atmosphere of a dinner party!"~~

Many big Soviet receptions were taking place about this time to celebrate the Revolution of 1917 (October in the Julian calendar but November in the modern). On 8th November in Potsdam Marshal Zhukov received the representatives of the capitalist world who had come—ironically enough—to congratulate him on the success of the Socialist Revolution.

The *décor* may have been Hohenzollern but it had been exploited fully to enhance stage-effects of a purely Russian character. At the entrance we were swiftly relieved of our hats and cloaks by a field officer and then, jostling against one another, were conducted at a fairly brisk pace down a gloomy and rather narrow corridor which served either to heighten the feeling of nervous excitement or else to plunge you into sombre meditation, according to your temperament. We finally emerged into a kind of vestibule, this time normally lighted (another shock for the retinal!) where we were greeted in silence by an officer who motioned us into a single line. We were then permitted to enter, one person at a time, into the sanctuary—an enormous hall completely shrouded in darkness; no, not completely, for in the centre, bathed in the glare of a floodlight, his uniformed chest loaded with medals, stood Marshal Zhukov, conqueror of Berlin, and the most illustrious name in the Soviet Union save that of Stalin. I watched from the entrance as the solitary advancing figures loomed up out of the darkness, greeted the great leader, and then turned, only to be swallowed once more in the enveloping gloom. It was a tableau charged with symbolism and, in spite of its theatrical character, immensely thrilling. Once again I was transported far from the ruins and cocktails of Berlin to an Asian plain where, in his pavilion, some khan of the Golden Horde was holding audience.

I entered and emerged like the rest and then, with my companions, was taken in charge by a group of generals and field officers who swept us off to where the good things of this life—food and drink of every kind—were laid out with that lavish profusion which I shall now always associate with

Potsdam. That evening was to test the drinking capacity of generals, diplomats, jurists and economists alike; eminent men from many nations, united by a single factor—a distinct unsteadiness about the feet!

We were anxious to recover from the Soviet Zone a quantity of material and munitions which the Germans had carried away from arsenals in France (particularly Rochefort) and stored at Yessenitz, near Schwerin. This should have been a simple operation—after all we travelled every day in and out of the American and British Zones—but in effect it was only after repeated and protracted negotiations that we finally obtained authority to enter the Soviet Zone.

Until then nobody had been in this direction and eagerly I saw in this journey an unexpected opportunity to meet the Soviet Navy apart from across the Directorate table in the presence of the other Allies. In some way, too, I felt that I was about to experience afresh those happy Atlantic Wall days of the previous year.

We left before dawn on a cold January morning; snow lay over the surrounding countryside but the road had been cleared and we proceeded without difficulty. I sat with the Captain in charge of the Soviet mission which accompanied us while the specialist whom I was taking along travelled in another car.

My companion was a most agreeable talker and, after we had exchanged the more usual remarks, gave me his own war-history. In 1941 he had been attached to the Baltic Fleet as a Gunnery officer, but when the siege of Leningrad began had been immediately recalled and placed in charge of an artillery formation on land. Their war had been hectic: spotting enemy gun-positions, laying down furious barrages; now engaging naval units out at sea; now blasting enemy columns approaching by land; now turning to the skies to meet the heavy bombers which had come to pound their own gun-positions—all operations which involved numerous range-adjustments and many anxious hours. Their war was against

the constant encroachment of cold and hunger, and their hope lay in keeping free the one road which still linked them to the rest of the Soviet Union—the road to Lake Ladoga and the East. The Germans continued their stranglehold until even the splendours of Peterhof, Gatchina, Pavlovsk and Pushkin sank beneath their hammer-blows to join the mounting sea of ruins.

“But we stood fast. We would not yield. Leningrad won through!”

The words were spoken with very little emphasis, but I found them moving. This was no officer presenting a report or making an historical speech, but just a man—like the peasant in the snow there, bending beneath his pile of faggots—a man proud of his country, proud to have done his duty and who was now opening his heart freely to a fellow-sailor. It was a human impression, untouched by political considerations, and of the kind I cherished.

We travelled on between birches and pines. The sun had now risen behind us and the snow reflected a kind of tinted radiance. Everything about us seemed clearer and larger than life. The Captain suggested that we should stop for some breakfast. Were we about to eat a meal in the open air? The attractive appearance of the woods and snow around could hardly compensate for such an ordeal. But I was soon comforted by the sight of a house with a smoking chimney which stood by the roadside.

We went in and found two old Germans in the room. They rose to their feet apprehensively.

“Outside!” thundered the Captain.

The little old men scuttled out like rabbits. We sat down and tucked into a solid Russian meal of salmon and some other items which, although rather fatty, dissolved in a most pleasant manner when washed down with vodka. We were by now quite cosy and had forgotten all about the two old men shivering outside. Suddenly the Captain exclaimed.

“Here, we can’t leave those poor devils out in that cold! They’re working people, after all!”

He ordered one of the sailors in the party to find them and before long the old men were standing before us, terrified and speechless.

“Well, aren’t you going to have something to eat?”

They made a show of refusal, but the sailor pushed them towards our leavings and everybody was happy.

That evening we arrived at Schwerin, which was to be our home for the next few days.

We now turned to the problem before us. It was viewed first from this angle, then from that; the wildest suggestions were put forward for consideration; the visits and discussions seemed endless. Suddenly the Soviet captain announced that the whole matter was clear in his own mind, and would I be good enough to put forward concrete suggestions—as if I had not been doing this for the past three days! I received the impression that during these days my opposite number had been not so much discussing a question as thinking out loud, completely oblivious to any reaction of mine: he saw in me an excuse for making a speech—a stretch of country where from time to time a landmark could be found to assist him in the formulation of some new line of argument. The instant he had managed to talk himself into some kind of opinion—the moment he was, as he put it, “clear in his own mind,” he felt able to restore my personality to its rightful owner! The remarkable thing was that throughout the discussions he displayed evidence of the greatest goodwill and every one of the solutions prompted by the tumult of his brain or the working of his subconscious tended towards a solution of the problem which could well have given satisfaction to all the parties concerned. It was a process of thinking and reasoning which I was often to recognise on later occasions; confusing to those unprepared for it and irritating to anybody who is by nature impatient or easily nettled. In short, we came to an agreement and the operation in question was carried out with only minor difficulties.

Before our return the local Naval Commander gave a party

in our honour. It was on the usual lavish scale and was graced by the presence of the officers' families. It proved to be a most pleasant evening. We talked of everything except politics, and dined, danced and drank until a late hour, when we finally took our leave and drove off into the snow and darkness to reach Berlin by seven the following morning.

In saying good-bye to me the Soviet Captain, quite moved, spoke these words:

"We've done some good work together, enjoyed each other's company and got to know each other. Try to come to our country one day—I look forward to meeting you there."

I was once again filled with an intense desire to know more about this man's homeland and that mysterious new world which it symbolised. It seemed to me the one adventure in my much-travelled life which I had still to experience. It was no longer enough to bemoan or deplore: I had to *know*.

Back in Berlin Directorates and Co-ordinating Committees came and went while work became more and more a matter of routine. In our Maritime branch we managed to set up a German survey institute and came to a decision regarding the type of coastal vessels to be left in the hands of our late enemies; but that was about all, and on other matters it was more difficult to obtain agreement. We agreed unanimously, for example, that the question of punishment for German military leaders was one of prime importance, but we all viewed it from different angles. The Russians came out flatly for committing the whole German High Command to life imprisonment, while the Western Powers, more varied in their attitudes, preferred to examine each case on its merits. A deadlock ensued, during the course of which one could have been excused for thinking that the question before the assembled powers was not so much the disarmament and reparations to be undergone by Germany (who, far from being the central issue at Potsdam had now become a mere blurred memory) as of who could score against whom. It was nothing but a

game of political obstruction in which each power did its utmost to prevent the others from gaining any kind of advantage, a game which our Soviet colleagues played to perfection and in which the others were not exactly beginners. Our difficulties only reflected those which were being experienced in the international sphere by our governments and on a number of occasions some pretty disagreeable remarks were exchanged. The whole business was exasperating and quite unproductive.

One April morning I received a phone call from Paris informing me that I was to be sent to Moscow as Naval Attaché. A visa would take a little time to arrange, and meanwhile I was to continue in my duties at Berlin.

On 14th July we gave a reception to which our colleagues from the other navies were invited. Here I met once again my Captain from Yessenitz who had come with his wife and daughter. It was a very friendly occasion which, incidentally, witnessed the complete collapse of the Soviet chauffeur, more accustomed to vodka than to wine, or rather wines. The Captain renewed his spoken wish that we might meet in the Soviet Union, and invited me to come and see him in the Crimea.

At last, in August, my visa came through and after a round of farewell visits to my Berlin colleagues (the Russians being more cordial than ever) I returned eagerly to France in order to make some purchases and get my luggage together. It was decided that my daughter, who had just passed her diploma in Russian, was to accompany me to the Soviet Union, leaving the rest of the family to join us later.

Naval Attaché to Moscow! A new adventure was about to begin, and one which the experience of more than a year's contact with the Soviet Navy encouraged me to regard with optimism.

Now for the joy of *knowing!*

## CHAPTER II

# The Adventure Begins

I MADE a preliminary trip by plane from Paris to Moscow in order to present myself to the Ambassador there and then returned to Paris in order to wind up some service matters. In Autumn, 1946, I left once more for Moscow, this time by train. The adventure had now really begun.

Warsaw is no longer the West but an area of uncertainty where both East and West seem to be in conflict; a dilemma reflected in the language of Poland itself—a Slav tongue which is recorded in Roman script. There was no time for strolling or musing here, nor to visit the Church of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, yet another ruin amongst so many, where the heart of Chopin is enshrined. On a gloomy evening we left the Hotel Polonia for the station, in order, somehow or other, to find a seat on the Soviet train which was coming from Berlin. We made our way along through a fine mist, half snow, half drizzle, which was blowing in from the East. It had melted here and there into pools of blackish mud through which we squelched despairingly. It settled on our bodies, softly, insinuatingly, enveloping us in a kind of slimy, tenacious shroud. At the station crowds of people were churning about silently on the open, badly-lit platforms. Their appearance suggested the East and was far removed from that of the travelling public in the international *wagon-lits* of the Paris train which we had left but a few hours previously.

The journey that night was uneventful. We could hardly make out the occupants of the neighbouring compartments but from time to time caught a whiff of Russian tobacco, which

was almost a relief from some of the other smells we had encountered on the station before leaving. Everybody seemed lost in a heavy slumber.

The following morning we passed through the Customs at the Polish frontier station and then, slowly, moved under a bridge with barbed wire and observation-posts manned by Soviet frontier-guards, to enter the station of Brest. The name Brest has taken the place of Brest-Litovsk, probably in order to efface the unpleasant memories of past history. However, history is history, and Brest now means the Soviet Union.

We alighted from the Polish train and filed off through the snow to the passport office, our baggage being taken on ahead to the Customs by porters clad in white aprons, now always associated in my memory with earlier visits to Riga and Reval on the Baltic. The formalities proved to be less irksome than I had anticipated but were terribly long. A diplomatic passport alone is not sufficient and must be accompanied by either a *laissez-passer* endorsed with Soviet seals, or else a courier's letter; in other respects the procedure is normal, but carried out with great solemnity.

The Customs officer seems singularly attracted by any book of Western origin. He considers it carefully, weighs it in his hand, sniffs it and then, highly suspicious, probably decides to confiscate it, although in nine cases out of ten he cannot understand a single word of the language in which it is written. Once the regulation has been carried out one can argue about it until blue in the face, but to no avail.

Owing to the difference in the railway gauges (wider in the Soviet Union) our train was unable to continue directly to Moscow and we were faced with the problem of how to pass the intervening hours. Watch the trains go by? But here the trains were all stationary, and in any case the forbidding aspect of the employees, whose glance suggested at once that they had marked us down as foreign spies, did not encourage us to hang about the platform. A walk through the town, perhaps? The wind, the snow and the sordid houses set

beside roads which were nothing more than quagmires made the very idea seem abhorrent. Should we join that pile of humanity which lay huddled and muffled alongside the fence? Somehow, we could not bring ourselves to stretch out on the ground, just anywhere, with our heads resting against other people's stomachs, enveloped in the pungent, humid odour of bodies, *tulups*\* and leather boots; we could not become part of that bundle of arms and legs and share that heavy slumber.

Only the restaurant remained. We pushed through the narrow door, bumping against a table as we did so, and found a smoke-filled room with more tables, each of which was covered by a dirty cloth and a glass jug containing some faded paper flowers of an exotic design. Dotted round the room would-be customers sat waiting (as always in the Soviet Union). When they finally managed to give their orders they were rewarded, after a further delay, by the appearance of an enormous serving of soup or boiled meat, or perhaps a couple of hundred grammes of vodka which was placed on their table by the harrassed waiter. The customer tossed the vodka down in one gulp and then, crouching low over his food, his forearms flat on the table, began to eat. His head set up a swaying movement as it travelled from the fork on one side of the plate to the spoon on the other, these implements being more or less clamped down to the table in a vertical position, which greatly assisted the process of eating. A glass of hot tea wound up the meal. It seemed almost as if these people ate from sheer physical necessity and that life itself had become a mere ramification of the alimentary canal.

But, after all, one had to eat, and during the course of my own meal I had ample opportunity to observe the men and women around me; the manual workers, officers, officials and soldiers who, in the most natural and uninhibited way, were even now performing this basic ritual of sustenance. The sight provided a vivid introduction to the power of materialism, and put me in mind of certain physical needs of my own.

\* *Tulup*: a sheepskin coat with the fleece on the inside.

I made my way to the first floor of the restaurant building and down a dark and damp corridor flanked by many doors, each bearing the name of some office, department or even sub-department, so that one felt that the place must be a veritable hive of administration. At the end of the corridor was a room equipped with green arm-chairs and a large portrait of Stalin, but I was given to understand that this room was reserved for distinguished persons passing through Brest. Nearby I found toilets and wash-basins. Here screaming brats were having their faces vigorously wiped by women who, in the course of their struggles with the unpredictable water taps, succeeded in squirting cold water over those standing near. Some men were attempting to shave in front of bits of broken mirror. The clutter of packages, the abandoned scraps of food, the sludgy foot-prints, the recumbent figures, together with the combined smells of strong tobacco, latrines, sausages and sweat conjured up a picture of some forward battle-area rather than a railway station; an area thronged with refugees and nomads, whose presence only served to increase further the depression I had already experienced at the sight of the snow, the sleepers and the brutal materialism personified in the restaurant below.

Information as to our time of departure was most difficult to obtain; the railway employees seemed suspicious and, rather than fall into an imagined trap, preferred to feign ignorance. I was unable to buy a time-table from the bookshop, for the simple reason that they did not stock one (the Soviet public would display no interest, anyway) and was obliged to endure this annoying uncertainty for quite a time. It was just a question of knowing upon which door to knock—and I had to knock on a good few before I found out what I wanted.

And all those other people? They waited (as the Soviet Public always waits) with admirable calm, silent and resigned, in the blind confidence that when the time came the relevant administrative deity would thunder out the necessary instructions and so release them from their sad vigil.

Ultimately we were led to a big so-called "international" railway-carriage which had been made in France during the time of Fallières and was of wooden construction. It must have represented the height of comfort in that already distant epoch and apparently still did in its new Soviet home. A further reminder of the past history of this relic—this glory of France's more opulent days, now converted into Russian rolling-stock—was to be found in the washroom of the carriage where, sandwiched between some directions in Russian, blazed forth the words: *Le vase est sous la toilette.*

For the next thirty-six hours we saw nothing but forests and immense stretches of snow-covered fields. From time to time a broad river would appear between gentle rises in the ground and then the eternal theme of forests and fields would be resumed. The train crept on at a snail's pace, making frequent halts; these only provided the opportunity for examining at greater leisure the forests of pine and birch and the plain surrounding us—that great plain which begins in Brandenburg and continues on, scarcely checked by the Urals, to the Yenesei and the Lena before being swallowed up in the vastness of the Siberian tundra.

The miles disappeared behind us like casual memories until, (doubtless at the hour ordained by the same formless administrative power responsible for launching us on this journey) we found ourselves drawing to a final halt. Moscow at last!

Here, amidst the bustling porters, I could pick out some friends standing on the platform. We drove in a car marked with a "D" (Diplomatic) registration through streets where the confused uproar seemed in some way heightened by my own ignorance of the unfamiliar traffic regulations. Finally, to complete the day, I sought a bath, a book and a few moments' peace—time enough to realise that I was now in the heart of a land whose people had yesterday created Russia and were today creating the Soviet Union.

The Embassy was unable to put me up and until a house or apartment could be reserved for me I was obliged, in common with many other diplomats in the Soviet capital, to live in a hotel. Hotels for foreigners, such as the National, Metropole and Savoy, are under the control of Intourist (the Soviet tourist organisation) and divided up into rooms or small apartments. They provide an effective if somewhat rough introduction to certain realities of Soviet life.

One might be excused if one concluded that the allocation of rooms is decided by a lottery, since it is difficult to account in any other way for some of the arrangements. Why, for instance, should three people—a counsellor, his wife and daughter—be crammed into a single badly-lit room with no bath while next to them a journalist and his mistress possess two good rooms with a bathroom attached? Why should this permanent attaché be accorded the minimum, while that member of some passing delegation be favoured with the maximum of space? This sort of thing tended to make foreigners dissatisfied, and they could find no pleasure in the memory of rooms which were badly decorated, which contained not a single drawer or cupboard capable of being locked and where the windows looked on to an enclosed courtyard. Even the rooms with baths were not free from this taint of melancholy. However, these same foreigners would be the first to admit that the hotel service was good; the floor-manageress and chambermaids valued their jobs, were very civil and helpful and did their utmost to avoid any grounds for complaint. These poor women, after all, were not responsible for the placing of the hotel windows! My daughter and I were lucky enough to have a room apiece. Hers overlooked an avenue; mine faced the courtyard, but was blessed with a bath.

In spite of the strict rules governing the personnel and general conduct of the hotel there were some unfortunate incidents. One person was robbed of a large sum of money and another was relieved of a complete wardrobe; but such things can happen in any part of the world. The incident I am

about to relate, however, could have occurred only in the Soviet Union.

One day I found that some champagne, cognac and French wine had disappeared from my room at the Metropole, and I thereupon lodged a complaint with the management. I was informed coldly that the possibility of theft was out of the question. If these bottles had disappeared it must be because I had drunk the lot, and if I had done that I was obviously in no position to remember very clearly what actually *had* happened!

"Very well," I replied, "if that is the case, would you be good enough to point out the empty bottles to me, since even an inveterate drunkard would hardly make a meal of glass?"

"You must have thrown them out of the window."

"But that's not possible, Comrade Director, since your people have stuck packing paper all round the windows in order to keep out the draughts" (the usual practice in winter).

"Then you must have made a present of them to the hotel manager."

I could only raise my hands in amazement at such a very unlikely supposition.

"All right," conceded this defender of virtue, "your bottles have been stolen."

"That's what I've been telling you."

"Yes, but it must be some of your fellow-foreigners who stole them, and here you are, trying to make out that it was done by Soviet citizens."

Unassailable!

I did not recover the bottles but—an implicit confession?—from that day on a watchman was placed on permanent duty in the corridor.

I found my year of hotel-existence dreary in the extreme and suffered especially from the fact that I was unable to have the rest of my family with me. I love travel: a journey to the Antipodes would never have worried me, nor the prospect of long months to be spent in my own company, all provided that

I could be on board ship. But being aboard the good ship Metropole Hotel was a very different matter!

Fortunately, unless one is most unlucky, this sojourn at a hotel is not permanent and I was eventually assigned the living quarters of the military attaché who was then giving up his appointment and whose place I was taking.

I had really fallen on my feet this time: my new home was a private two-storied house facing the Moskva and commanding one of the most beautiful views of the Kremlin in Moscow. The ground floor contained three offices and a dining-room, while on the upper floor, approached by a staircase of monumental proportions, were the bedrooms, my study and the living-room.

The most intriguing place of all was the basement, with its kitchen, two bins for wood and coal and also what I liked to call my two "lockers," where provisions were kept. These were veritable glory-holes of boxes, trunks and old clothes and even contained spare parts for cars which were now no more but had belonged to my predecessors or perhaps to the Embassy itself. An enormous powerful-looking boiler stood in the lower part of the basement, ready to protect us against the extreme cold of the Moscow winters. Behind the house was a garage and also a large garden in which my house-steward grew salads in summer and in the winter piled up great mounds of snow for the children's toboggan.

I was now able to work at home if necessary, but had also my office at the Embassy itself, within twenty minutes' walking distance. I followed this path along the Moskva every morning, partly for the exercise, partly to escape from the world of official papers, but also in order to see some water. My life was now transformed, since my new lodgings had made it possible to send for my wife and sons. Even my grandson came for a few months to swell the happy throng.

The house needed a certain amount of repair work and improvement and in order to obtain labour for this I applied to the Foreigners' Aid Bureau, whose Russian initials spelt out the

word "Burobin." It all took ages to arrange, but finally the workmen arrived—in considerable force—and the massacre began. They seemed unable to lay a tool down without causing a mess or to handle the electric light bulbs without smashing one or two of them. They left behind taps which had to be changed once a month and paint which almost immediately showed signs of flaking. It all took so long and was very badly done; they just did not know how to set about it. Yet these engineers and workmen had really done their best, were very conscientious and most anxious for praise. The exasperating part was that they really believed that they were doing well and that their working methods were the most modern and advanced possible. From this lofty pinnacle of self-esteem they were inclined to view all Western technicians very disparagingly and to dismiss them as being completely ignorant.

I found that it was worse than useless to complain to the works-inspector who dropped in from time to time, since he would only proceed to point out how very well it was all being done and generally managed to discover some additional feature which needed attention—all to the profit of Burobin!

By beating them at their own game it was possible, of course, to check these ravages. One could just refuse to accept the inspector's recommendations, spin matters out, oblige this engineer to work according to specification, tell that labourer not to slack, menace them both with a letter complaining of neglect of duty, or even wave a contract about with some crafty insinuation or other. But this course involved wasted time, much talk and argument, lengthy correspondence and other unpleasant factors.

The most amusing Burobinian story was that of two foreigners who were obliged to leave their flat, as the city authorities had condemned the building as unhealthy and were about to demolish it. The removal took place smoothly enough, but just as they themselves were about to leave, a Burobin inspector appeared at the door. He looked round,

pondered for a moment and then, with a sudden smile, demanded that the flat should now be completely redecorated.

"Your contract stipulates that you must leave the flat in the exact condition in which you found it. You can't get away from that."

"But they've already started to pull the building down—surely this clause can no longer apply?"

"I'm sorry, but here's your signature. You'll have to do it."

"But it would be like fitting out a corpse with gold teeth!"

"What's all this about a corpse and a dentist? I don't follow. . . ."

That discussion might have continued for ever.

Well, it was true that the flat looked rather a mess. Knowing that nobody would be moving in after them the occupants had left some straw and old newspapers around—litter of the type which always accompanies a removal. A little broom-work about the place helped to establish some kind of truce. The following day the inspector made no mention of redecoration but questioned them very closely concerning one other point: what was all that about gold teeth?

Now that the work was completed at my own house, the invoices came pouring in. Sometimes they were sent immediately, but usually after a long delay. These invoices had to be checked very carefully; at times the same bill would be presented twice or perhaps the same item be listed first on a repair bill and then under goods supplied. The charges were extremely high. Once money had been paid over incorrectly it was impossible to recover it or even to have the amount credited. Was this inefficiency, dishonesty or a mixture of both?

This official tariff could be sidestepped by applying to the black market for labour—indeed the Burobin inspectors themselves advised such a course and sent along men who, in order to augment their incomes, were prepared to work in their leisure hours and holidays. Whether there was some mutually

satisfactory financial arrangement between these people and the inspectors I do not know, but in this way it was possible, for example, to obtain window-panes (of inferior quality and with faults, no doubt, but at least serviceable). Paradoxically enough, charges for this black market service were well below the official ones and the cost of hiring a painter or electrician in this way could be cut to a fifth of that normally demanded. This is the only means open to foreigners living in the Soviet Union of competing with the State.

The daily life of a diplomat is similar to that of any other person, but can at times be complicated by the fact that he has the dual responsibility of representing his country and also of running a large domestic establishment. It was impossible to employ staff direct and in any case all such personnel had to be vetted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Once more Burobin came to the rescue and supplied me with the necessary domestic help—not a very polished lot, perhaps, but pleasant, polite and anxious to give satisfaction. These servants took an interest in the house and shared in the life of the family (even if only in order to spy on them). They spoke of "our house, our little boy, our car," and this I found rather touching. At times their reactions were quite unpredictable and they appeared to have little or no sense of initiative. Nothing could be done about all this, of course, but with such uncertain elements below stairs the mistress of the house was hardly to be blamed for feeling on tenterhooks when faced with the prospect of giving a reception or dinner-party.

Once these servants had adopted the house they made themselves at home in no uncertain fashion and proceeded to transform my basement into a kind of encampment. Here they ate, smoked, told stories and, if one of our parties looked like being prolonged, would settle down for the whole night (after carefully swallowing down anything they found left in the bottles and glasses). Although slow, they were very honest and loved to be asked to give a hand with something. I remember these good, generous-hearted souls with affection.

But some superior authority (perhaps the police) seemed to control the movements of even such humble people. One day a man came to me, rather ill at ease, and announced that he could no longer continue in my service. Although he gave no reason for his leaving, he had at least given me notice; this is more than can be said for the chauffeur who disappeared without any warning at all, or the woman who used to do our shopping, and who one morning saw her unexpected replacement loom up, just as she herself was about to leave for the market. Some servants disappeared and we heard nothing about them again, in spite of our enquiries.

One can only conclude that these poor people had become suspect by reason of their association with foreigners.

### CHAPTER III

## The True Face of Moscow

THE appearance of the crowd first drew my attention. In winter the men wore fur caps and heavy fur-lined overcoats, while during very hot weather they went about in shirt-sleeves; otherwise they wore ordinary suits and peaked caps. The winter costume for women was much the same as the men's except that they wore a woollen shawl wrapped around the head and neck. They were a little gayer in warmer weather, but all their dresses seemed to have been cut from an identical pattern, with square shoulders, high neckline, a barely defined waist and a skirt well above the knee. Their shoes were rather solid and the whole outfit was perhaps crowned by a hat dug up from heaven knows where. In this Muscovite barracks there was no elegance, no taste—only the dreary monotony of a uniform. I rarely saw people smile in the streets.

The only hint of freshness and gaiety was provided by the children, especially the little girls with their trim black school uniforms, white pinafores and collars and neatly braided hair. Perhaps these young female citizens will learn to take a greater interest than their elders in their appearance.

The officers were very smartly turned out and, except for the fatigue dress, their uniform was the same as that worn by other ranks. The general public gave an impression of youth and health—as if they, too, were soldiers who had emerged successfully from a series of fitness tests. I saw very few old people or drunkards in the streets.

In order to get my bearings I began by making myself

familiar with the main thoroughfares of the city and started with Gorky Street, which some enthusiasts have compared with the Champs-Elysées. I think they exaggerate in this, but Gorky Street, with its wide causeway and pavements, is nonetheless a fine sight and the only street to contribute a breath of modernity to the old Russian capital; it rises sharply from the centre of the city and is lined with new, pleasantly-designed houses, bookshops and stores of all kinds.

These business premises were known not under the name of a firm or proprietor but by their street numbers: one did not buy needles and thread at Ivanov's, pop into Petrov's for milk, or browse through Smirnov's for a book, but went to Store 812, Grocer 3 or Bookshop 78. I could never quite reconcile myself to this system and in an effort to attach faces and personalities to the numerals, found myself referring to "that old lady who speaks French," "the sulky girl," "that cheery bookseller."

The outline of the Kremlin is surely one of the most beautiful and varied in the world, with its mixture of cupolas and crosses, mediaeval Tartar-style towers decorated by Italians, nineteenth-century buildings and its massive containing walls of brick with their few and closely-guarded entrances. When viewed from the Red Square the Kremlin loomed forbiddingly, a solid structural mass of unrelated parts; but from the Sophia or Kropotkin Quays these same parts united to form a unique and integrated whole—a silhouette surmounted by a gleaming cross, extremely delicate and light and which in the glow of evening gave an impression of transparency. Throughout the night huge red stars shone out from the towers above the ramparts.

St. Basil's Cathedral, on Red Square, had been converted into a museum. Like the Kremlin it looked well from a distance but at close quarters became dull and ugly. It reminded me of stage scenery—charming and convincing when seen from the auditorium and under appropriate lighting, but of cardboard, all the same. Again, I thought of villages I had

seen perched on the sides of mountains, so attractive from the sea, with their bright colours and terraced gardens (surely inhabited by a race of patriarchs!) but which turned out to be nothing more than arrangements of crumbling brick, their alley-ways filled with stinking refuse.

If the Soviet Union officially admitted the existence of a soul, this would without a doubt be the Lenin Mausoleum, the focal point of Red Square. I joined the closely herded and supervised crowd on one of the visiting days and with them passed slowly by the motionless armed figures at each side of the doorway, out of the light of day and into the twilight darkness of the entrance hall. Here the mood had been set with a fitting sense of the dramatic: obedient to the subdued murmuring of an attendant we turned to our left and in a silence broken only by the sepulchral whispered instructions of other attendants, began in pairs our slow, muffled descent of the carpeted stairway. At the bottom we again turned, this time to the right, and entered the sanctuary.

In the centre of this large room, beneath a glass case, lay the embalmed body of Lenin. The lighting had been arranged in such a way that his impressively large forehead seemed luminous; his hands were slender and almost translucent, one of them being slightly clenched. I stood musing for a moment in front of this figure—the father of Bolshevism, as powerful now as when he walked this earth—but then the officials and the gentle, forward movement of the crowd slowly nudged me on towards the exit, by the tombs and busts of the Revolution heroes and leaders of the regime, and back to the light and the brooding walls of the Kremlin. I have returned to the Mausoleum many times since, and have never failed to be impressed by the grandeur and symbolism of the experience, the reverent mood of the crowd and also the police organisation involved in the guardianship of this sanctuary.

I drew up outside the unprepossessing little building in Frunze Street which housed the Foreign Relations Section of

the Soviet Navy. I had arrived to pay my official visit to the naval authorities to whom I was attached, and was suitably dressed for the occasion, with uniform, decorations and aiglets. I entered a narrow corridor and was about to mount the stairs when I saw, reflected in the enormous mirror placed at the turn of the stairway on an intermediate landing, the figure of a strangely dressed man, no longer in his first youth, who closely observed my approach. I started, but then suddenly realised that this man was on the landing yet above and looking down the stairs towards the mirror. I returned gaze for gaze and continued my climb to where the mirror stood. Here I turned, expecting to see my observer on the next landing; but he had vanished. I discovered him again on the first floor and found that his function was that of a porter or usher. His dress—a masterpiece of improvisation—consisted of a magnificent cap and an ancient blue frock-coat with faded badges and gilt buttons. All his movements were carried out in complete silence. Later, I discovered that he was a mute and after a number of visits I eventually came to be honoured with his smile of greeting. Whatever he lacked in the power of speech he made up for in vigilance. He now relieved me of my coat, cap and snow-boots, conducted me to a small waiting-room, and then withdrew.

The room was very simply furnished with a table, covered by a green cloth, a few chairs and some ashtrays. The window faced a courtyard but the brilliance of the electric light banished the grey world outside. Although I had arrived punctually, nothing appeared to be happening and soon I began to yawn. Was my flunkey-friend even now observing me through the keyhole?

The door opened and a young officer appeared. He introduced himself and then led me into a large room where I found seated round a table awaiting my arrival, an impressive number of officers, both naval and military, among them a general and a naval captain. They rose to their feet as I walked in and I took my place at the table. The atmosphere

was solemn. As I made my little speech I could not help noticing out of the corner of my eye that a young officer was jotting down my every word. The attitude of this reception committee was courteous and correct, but could hardly have been described as helpful. When I asked their advice as to how I might best tackle a study of the Soviet Navy's role during the recent war they referred me to a collection of the newspapers published during that period. When I expressed my wish (customary upon such an occasion) to pay my respects to the Chief of the Naval General Staff, the Captain informed me that I would be advised at the appropriate time. I found this reception chilly (in marked contrast to that accorded to me by my Russian colleagues in Berlin) and felt little inclined to prolong the visit. The Captain accompanied me to the door where, with a broad smile, he invited me to call in again as often as I wished.

My car was no longer where I had left it and I found that my chauffeur had parked it in a neighbouring street. He was sleeping peacefully at the wheel, awaiting my return.

When I gave an account of this interview to my foreign colleagues they found nothing unusual in it.

"You mustn't go by what you have seen in Berlin or France," one of them said to me. "The Russians behave quite differently, according to which side of the frontier they are, and you've just got to get used to that. And don't go imagining that there is any calculated animosity on their part —there's a certain amount of distrust, perhaps, but they've always been a bit inclined that way."

Following my friend's advice I adjusted myself quite rapidly to these conditions. During the whole of my time in Moscow I was told nothing. Perhaps this natural secretiveness on the part of the Soviet people stands the authorities in good stead where military matters are concerned; I observed that when the papers spoke of "The cruiser N—" or "General Y—" or even "an air formation has landed at X—" people accepted this form of news item as a matter of course.

A stroll at random is an excellent means of getting to know any country and the Soviet Union is no exception to the rule. Moscow in particular offered an especially wide field for observation and, to tell the truth, in the early days of my stay I hardly knew what to do other than wander through the main streets of the city, admiring the attractive and well-constructed houses. Later, I took to roaming round in a taxi or the Embassy car and made the acquaintance of the innumerable little alley-ways with which Moscow abounds. They lay far removed from the impressive façades and star-highways of the guide book and figured in none of the organised tours. Here cobble-stones set the car shuddering, the pavements were narrow and covered with an uneven cracking surface of asphalt; the roof-gutters leaked; the brickwork peeled and moisture seemed to ooze through everything. Some of the houses were of recent construction and yet both houses and streets were a picture of negligence and decay. So this was the squalid back-door of the façades I had lately admired!

Not one of the magnificent-looking avenues or causeways which were pompously classified as motor-highways could compare for a moment with the German *Autobahn* or the great West road leading out of Paris. To motor along them was to subject the car-springs to a constant series of jolts, caused by the frequent patches of unevenness in the surface, and to crash against sections of tramline which had popped up out of the tarmac. I could never understand why it was so impossible to construct a normal road, without these bumps and ruts. The pavements were in no better state: after the rain or thaw the water poured down from the roof or through the gutters directly on to the pavements, settling in scummy pools between the cracks. Nobody thought to direct this stream into the gutter. A car-drive in conditions such as these became terribly tiring; it was a supreme test of nerves for both driver and passenger and one of endurance for the bodywork and springs of the vehicle itself.

Road repairs were always in progress and particularly after

the snows. It was a common sight to see women, surrounded by a cloud of dry, grey dust, wielding pick-axes or supporting pneumatic drills on their forearms as they broke up the road-surface. Everything was done in a tearing hurry and the results were in no way remarkable.

Trees were a rarity and even in the larger avenues were often stunted. This absence of greenery in the streets, characteristic of the city, was due to the arid and rigorous climate from which Moscow suffered.

Moscow housing was full of violent contrasts. On the Sadovaya and other big avenues near the centre of the capital stood many very fine buildings which gave an impression of order and cleanliness; but a stone's throw away, tucked down some unsavoury alley-way, other constructions told a very different story. I have met many people who, when visiting Moscow, relied solely upon an official guide for their tour of the city and who have then returned to the West after living for a few days in the rosy pipe-dream of the National Hotel. They have not seen that other Moscow. If only they could have joined me in my walks through the city; have lost themselves as I did in the cemetery, canal or river districts; have threaded their way through the tangle of houses between Kirov and Dzerzhinsky Streets—have diverged even a little from their set route by taking a peep behind those new houses in Gorky Street—they could claim to have seen Moscow!

Since there was no local stone, the houses were of brick construction. The exterior brickwork was given a protective coating of some nondescript colour, but this soon cracked; water then poured down the walls and the façade began to crumble. When water was not lying in muddy or stagnant pools in front of the entrances, a hot wind blew a fine black dust over everything. The doorways themselves were foul and dark; the flagstones were broken (and usually allowed to remain so); the doors fitted badly; the staircases were dirty ramshackle affairs and the electric light bulbs as often as not had been filched. The courtyards contained further pools of

water and were cluttered up with refuse. Misery and filth seeped through everything. Here and there a cavity led down into a basement where, in some horrible little dungeon, yet another little world of dirt and water was revealed by the light which managed to filter through a mud-encrusted ventilator. The whole place was impregnated with a strange odour composed of sweat, damp brick, cheap soap, decaying wood, badly-aired clothing and rotten garbage. To this had been added strong whiffs of onion and tobacco for good measure.

Inside these buildings little piles of humanity breathed and had their being: the tiny low-ceilinged rooms contained not only several beds, a table, two chairs, a stove and a cupboard, but also men and women—people who slept, read, played cards; who in the congestion of some communal kitchen spied on each other, denounced each other, or even, in a sudden access of fellow-feeling, were capable of making sacrifices for each other. They scrounged, stole, argued, came to blows and then, as suddenly, would patch everything up over a bottle of vodka. Mingling with the ceaseless talk and quarrelling, the blaring of the radios, with their propaganda and official pronouncements, came that insidious penetrating odour of the slum.

As a general rule the living-quarters themselves were kept clean and tidy; the beds looked neat, and nothing was left lying about. Sometimes ornamental paper flowers would be placed at the window, or a picture be pinned upon the wall. I could only suppose that the inhabitants of these shabby dwellings (whether living above or below ground) strove by such means to create their own little homes, even within rooms shared by several families. Whether they did this through a desire for comfort, a hope of better things, or because they were moved by some lingering spark of individualism, I do not know, but in such surroundings the gesture could arouse only feelings of pity.

Each building was presided over by a house-committee, itself represented on a higher committee by a person who

combined the functions of caretaker, policeman and quartermaster. Since this man did nothing to clean any section of the house which affected the occupants as a whole, such as a hallway, staircase or courtyard, it was hard to avoid the conclusion that he made use of his little piece of authority in order to feather his own nest. It might, of course, have been that the people around, conditioned by the inability to maintain anything in its proper state (which seems general in Moscow) cared little about the condition of these places, or that this was yet another example of the universally recognised apathy of the individual where communal amenities are concerned.

From time to time the district representative or the city authorities became uneasy, fearing no doubt the publication of unflattering comparisons between the fair exteriors and the foul interiors of the buildings under their jurisdiction. When this happened they would either repair the building or, more willingly, proceed to demolish it and distribute the occupants amongst other similar bivouacs. These might be situated in newly-constructed houses which, within a year, would begin to show the same signs of decay and dilapidation. The whole process would then be repeated.

Moscow slums made me think of Paris slums, and then of all those slums which mar the face of this earth—symbols of a universal misery which reaches beyond governments and politics and from whose heart springs the moral despair and wretchedness of millions.

Although the streets might provide material of great value and interest, it was essential to correlate what I observed there with a vast pattern of national and social behaviour. To understand this more fully I had to undertake a certain amount of reading and, upon the advice of my seniors at the Embassy, I began to study the basic texts of Communism, such as the history of the Communist Party, Leninism, etc. It was slow work and there were many dry patches, but I came to see that such a study was essential if I hoped to be initiated into the

Soviet manner of thought and reasoning, the public expression of which was to be found in those countless statements and leading articles by which the daily press hoped to educate its readers. In the performance of such duties I felt far removed from my fellow-officers serving afloat!

Our Embassy—our little bit of France—had formerly belonged to a rich merchant. It was a house of original design with a typically Russian exterior, but contained some beautiful French furniture. Our porter, a Russian who had served us in the St. Petersburg days, had known Delcassé and Poincaré, and wore his French decoration with great pride. My own office was a long, narrow room which faced a lane, patrolled regularly by the house detective. It contained maps of the Soviet Union, a safe and a number of shelves covered with some books and magazines bequeathed by my predecessors. On the wall I stuck a big map of the world which showed the three areas covered by our marine survey. This I did mainly because I could not reconcile myself to considering one country as being separate from the rest—today the ball had been thrown to the whole world!

Occasionally I would call upon the ministerial Counsellor in order to exchange ideas or to draw upon his experience of the country; or perhaps he would come to me and we would discuss the morning communiqué put out by the Soviet authorities. Meanwhile my secretary kept me well supplied with visiting-cards and notices of all the more important functions.

Our working hours were arranged to fit in with local practice and were in marked contrast to those I had known in France, being from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and again from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. As far as the work was concerned our life was one of study and meditation and assumed an almost monastic character. My colleagues were charming, cultured men and this period saw the foundation of many lasting friendships. Within this, our narrow home, we bent our endeavours towards a fuller understanding of the scene about us—and also the composing of our fortnightly dispatches for the diplomatic “bag.”

The "bag" was a major event, since the courier who accompanied it brought us news of France and was able to return with the expression of our accumulated thoughts, cogitations, hopes and fears. Twice a month the "bag" appeared and for a couple of days the Embassy would be in a whirl; then, after its departure, we would again settle down to our daily routine—that mask of monotony which served to conceal the ferment of ideas, dreams and ambitions within each one of us.

I was, however, a naval man accredited to my naval counterparts in a foreign country and my duty was to maintain relations with them, even if it meant having to undergo the fixed gaze of the splendidly-attired mute in their Foreign Relations Section! Alas, in spite of the extreme courtesy displayed by my opposite numbers, our relations could at no time have been described as close and for the most part consisted of an exchange of papers relating to the marine survey—a project which was in any case nearing completion.

When Paris had asked me to obtain a list of the Soviet decorations, the gentlemen at Frunze Street referred me to the official bulletins. However, as luck would have it, I discovered such a list in a shop which specialised in military knick-knacks—a large sheet of decorations handsomely illustrated in full colour. This simple "find," and the fact that I was also able to purchase at a local bookshop a series of pamphlets on the actions in which the Soviet Navy had been engaged, inclined me to think that I was more likely to gain information by strolling about and frequenting places such as these than by relying upon the stale and unprofitable interviews at Frunze Street. Yet how easy it would have been for them to supply me with this material straight away!

I had been told that foreigners were usually regarded with distrust and suspicion and the truth of this was borne out by my own experiences. When I wished to visit Leningrad I was informed that this lay in a prohibited area. The same reply was given with regard to Sebastopol. Here "they" were,

trying to confine to the centre of a land mass the very naval attaché who, eighteen months previously, had conducted their own representatives over the Atlantic Wall!

The same attitude of distrust bedevilled relationships of a purely personal and private character. On one occasion I encountered outside the hotel a Soviet officer whom I had known in the Berlin days. We found ourselves face to face; escape was out of the question. He smiled awkwardly and gave a sidelong glance. When I asked for news of his colleagues he said that he had now lost track of them.

“And you yourself—what’s happening about you?” I asked.

“Oh, I don’t know yet—I’m waiting for instructions.”

“And in the meantime you’ll be staying here in Moscow?”

He replied that he would.

“I’d very much enjoy having a chat with you. What about having supper together one evening?”

“With pleasure, but unfortunately at the moment I’m terribly busy and can’t say exactly when I’m likely to be free.”

“That’s all right, just ring me at the hotel as soon as you can make it.”

“Right; and now you’ll really have to excuse me.” Again the embarrassed smile and that furtive glance. “I’ve an urgent appointment. I’ll be phoning you.”

He fled, as if fearing some contagion, and that was the last I saw or heard of him.

I realised that if matters were to be this way I would somehow have to manage on my own and hope that conditions would soon change and permit me to travel farther afield. I determined in the meantime to learn all I could about Moscow.

Even after I had become a regular traveller, the Metro (Moscow’s Underground) always made me feel something of a first-time visitor. Here I could observe a crowd giving itself up to amenities provided in a luxurious setting. As a piece of construction it was beautiful and impressive, the most recent stations being particularly fine. To those hurrying home to overcrowded living-quarters it must have seemed nothing

short of a fairy palace: the arched roofs were brilliantly lit; the walls were covered in marble or tiles most ingeniously decorated; there were escalators, refreshment-bars with lemonade; telephones and newspaper-stalls. The luxury of this subterranean world contrasted painfully with the squalor and misery above ground, and to anybody emerging from a well-lighted terminus it came as something of a shock to plunge once again into the realities of that other life.

Metro employees seemed very numerous. Their unengaging looks and air of grim importance could have served only to heighten the feeling of mild panic which gripped the more simple souls as they viewed the arrival of the roaring blue or green train destined to bear them still farther into the bowels of the earth. The front and rear portions of the train were reserved for the old and disabled and for women and children, but in spite of this seemed to be used by everybody. Such a state of affairs is hardly confined to Moscow!

For me the fascination of the Metro lay not so much in its external appearance, however, as in the behaviour of the people who used it. Here the Muscovite was provided with a rare opportunity for physical relaxation, except, of course, during rush hours; these, as elsewhere in the world, witnessed much savage struggling and jamming. Encouraged by the comfortable seats to throw off his customary tenseness and any bodily attitude (such as crossed legs) foreign to his natural comfort, he would usually sit heavily, legs apart, feet planted solidly upon the floor, his hands spread out on his knees and with a distant, fixed look in his eyes. Sometimes he would bunch himself up into a corner, stretch out his legs and then close his eyes, caring little whether he missed his station. Some of the younger people read, but this moment granted by fate was too precious to be wasted in talk. If possible, people slept, fitfully—as those other men and women slept, whom one saw being driven by truck to their labours.

Moscow and the Soviet Union have just cause to be proud of their Metro; and yet the words of that grumbling old lady

passenger may well have expressed the inner feelings of the majority of the people: "Ah, yes, it's beautiful, right enough—but think of all that money and how much more usefully it might have been spent!"

Despite their impersonal character, I was curious to see how the shops were operated. Long queues formed well before the morning and afternoon opening times, particularly if rare or sought-after articles, such as saucepans or shoes, were to be sold. When the doors opened, which they did very punctually, the customers swept forward, and elbowed their way into another queue at the display counter. Here they selected the article they wished to buy, queued again at a cash-desk to obtain a receipt, and finally lined up at the counter at which they had started to exchange the receipt for the article in question. The same process had to be repeated for anything displayed at another counter.

Although the shop-assistants made no effort to discover and satisfy the requirements of their clients, a spirit of genuine competition would often exist between the different departments of the same store, in order, no doubt, to increase the turnover and give the public the full advantage of any price reductions decreed by the government. A counter would sometimes be graced with a certificate attesting to the merits of the "Best Sales Brigade"—a military term which seemed strangely out of place when applied to the retail trade. In the absence of civility, this rivalry at least ensured a greater speed in service.

The bookshops—one of the curiosities of Moscow—seemed to be everywhere, with their uniform exteriors, their elaborate but tasteless window-dressing, the little flight of stairs by which one entered and their motley assortment of customers. Here I could find the occasional work of interest, the museum piece, or even propaganda posters. Despite its uniformity of appearance, each bookshop had its own speciality which was either announced outside the premises or was readily discernible

once one was inside. This specialisation was admittedly of a broad character; the Gorky Street shop, for instance, was noted for law books, but, in addition to the Soviet pandects contained on its shelves, displayed mining and transport textbooks and even some well-known novels. It was a "legal" bookshop insofar as it was the sole supplier of books on Soviet Law.

Whether through habit, a taste for routine, or perhaps through mere laziness, I always made the same circular tour when visiting "my" bookshops and, setting out from the Arbat (a busy shopping centre) would begin with the "Military," which was rather sober-looking; from here move on to the "Scientific" (run by the old lady who spoke French); from Gorky Street to Kuznetsky Most ("International" and also "Maps"), and finally—feeling perhaps that I had performed my official duties—I would continue my stroll down Kuznetsky Most more or less as my fancy took me. Still further bookshops lay before me.

The shop in Pushkin Street specialised in educational works. It contained primary and secondary textbooks on geography, grammar, mathematics, history, science and the rest, and also a crowd of jostling children, intent upon buying outline maps. Adults usually looked around and then walked away unless—caught by that over-riding hunger for self-education which is a characteristic of the Soviet masses—they decided upon a school-book for their own use. Which book hardly mattered; the chief aim was to read, to absorb science, without asking oneself whether the subject matter could be comprehended or mastered. After the usual tussles at the counter and pay-desk I myself would emerge, gasping, clutching in my arms a package done up in coarse paper and held together by lengths of whiskery hemp.

Across the street was the "Political" bookshop. One entered this by going down a few steps, almost as if in self-abasement before the huge portraits of Engels, Marx and Lenin, whose works lay enshrined in this dusty sanctuary.

Here books were sold at very low prices which ensured their being available to everyone: the student engaged in research, the librarian of the neighbouring workers' club, the political representative of some state enterprise, or perhaps an official from a government information service, seeking to bring himself up to date upon the latest doctrinal interpretations and thus maintain himself in the Party line. By way of relief, to one side of this purely political counter lay a geographical section, while a little farther away another portion of the shop was devoted to propaganda posters, as lavish in their portrayal of the proud and excellent Soviet way of life as in their denunciation of all things foreign. The assistants seemed off-hand, almost irritable, and answered queries without troubling to look at the questioner. In her corner sat an old lady in woollies, clicking away with a weary hand at her age-worn abacus.\*

At the subscription office (an extremely busy if somewhat gloomy place) one applied for works such as the Great Encyclopædia, a dictionary of medicine, or the complete works of Pushkin—all publications of the more massive type, the issuing or reprinting of which was spaced over a lengthy period. To obtain these it was necessary to write out an order, complete a form and then pay a deposit at the cash-desk. Here two old ladies took charge of the would-be buyer with great efficiency; they seemed to smell out a foreigner a mile away, probably aided in this by the outlandish cut of his clothes. When I gave my name, upon paying my first subscription to the Encyclopædia, one old dear exclaimed "I knew it—you just *looked* Polish!" I never succeeded in convincing her to the contrary.

The whole system was well organised, all entries being made and signed on a card which was retained by the purchaser. Once the book required became available it arrived fairly promptly, although the various instalments of the same work might appear in a rather haphazard order. I once pointed this

\* The Russians use the abacus with great dexterity for all their everyday calculations and every office and pay-desk is equipped with one.

out to an employee. "A trifling detail!" was his only comment.

My great delight, however, lay in browsing through a second-hand book store, for in this way it was possible to pick up things not available at the ordinary bookshops and at times to unearth splendid bargains. To these shelves came soiled or used books of every date and variety: books cribbed by the student in search of material to bolster up some theory and now discarded; the remains of old libraries—witnesses to that splendid past now aped by a sordid present; books on art and history; technical works; books in Russian, Ukrainian, French and German; some in paper covers, some in luxury editions; some in the old Russian orthography, dating back to pre-1917 days; and, on rare occasions—for after all, one could not keep abreast of everything—recently condemned works by authors who had been publicly unmasked as traitors, spies and saboteurs. Occasionally an attempt was made to place together books related by subject, but generally, from every corner of these shops (whether in Moscow or one of the other large Soviet cities) peered out that familiar, jumbled array of books so dear to the frequenter of the Seine bookstalls in Paris, and which I now experienced an ironic pleasure at rediscovering in the Soviet capital.

The seller of second-hand books is born, not made: he is a compound of philosophy, culture, indulgence and good humour. These qualities were as present in the Moscow bookseller as in his fellows abroad. Through his contact with living customers, and with authors both living and dead, he had become endowed with a human—a humanist—trait which contrasted strangely with the raw violence of his surroundings. In a city where he himself was often treated with scant civility, the foreigner in Moscow could not help regarding this man as a friendly personality.

Sometimes I would forsake the bookshops and turn into a quiet and badly made-up street to visit the Folkcraft shop, much frequented by foreigners and known to us all since it lay

opposite the Burobin offices. Here were displayed examples of handwork from the various Soviet provinces: embroidery, carpets, pottery, and small objects in wood from places such as the Ukraine, Bielo-Russia, Viatka (now Kirov), the Urals and Kuban—all work of individuality which sometimes produced the unexpected, perhaps in the form of some delicate carving in mammoth-bone, or a portrait of Stalin on a green ground, set in a table-cloth worked in *gros point*. These craft products were terribly expensive and I myself possess only a few napkins, some embroidery work and toys—items which I could probably have discovered back home in the Russian shops of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Unfortunately the establishment was about to be transferred to one of the main streets, where its genuine craft character would undoubtedly become superceded by a commercial one.

The State commission-shops, or agencies, were also worthy of note. Here the Government, acting as middleman and at considerable profit to itself, sold at a high price goods which it had bought from the needy at a low one. These goods could not be procured in the normal way and were of the type normally to be found in flea-markets and bric-à-brac shops; not new, certainly, but at least available, which counted for a good deal. Most of these shops had their “speciality” such as crockery, furs, jewels and clothes—those consumer goods so despised by the State—and stood in relation to these much as did the dealers in second-hand books to newly published works. The fact that the goods handled were no longer new did not rule out the occasional “find.”

I remember, for instance, that one of these shops, which was situated next door to a second-hand clothing shop frequented by the poorer working people, dealt exclusively with articles of a costly type, such as silverware, jewellery, precious stones and perhaps a few pictures of minor merit. Its patrons were necessarily limited in number and consisted for the most part of foreigners, but there were also amateurs, traders, members of the new bourgeoisie, and a few casual onlookers. Here the

dealer was good enough to expand a little on the articles for sale and at times even vouchsafe a furtive smile or two. It was a breath of the old Russia, with silver table-services, diamonds, emeralds and rubies. . . . Nobody worried about the origin of these treasures; the main thing was to rake in the roubles!

Although such a shop represented a possible means of replenishing or embellishing my own home, I found even more intriguing the agency which specialised in gifts and travelling equipment and also one whose stock of fantastic head-gear included even periwigs!

Any bargaining was strictly forbidden; there was a fixed price which one either accepted or refused. It was an odd experience to witness Armenians or Tartars conducting sales under conditions which ruled out all the mock furies of haggling and the pleasures of argument so natural to them. When engaging in black market deals these people seemed more in their element and allowed themselves the pleasure of running through their whole gamut of bargaining attitudes. The East was verily just around the corner!

The bird market lay at the city limits in a big open court-yard and to reach it I had to combine a series of journeys by tram and foot. In appearance it resembled a country fair, and at first glance I could see only horses, cattle, rabbits, guinea-pigs and white mice around me, with horse-dealers and peasants arguing and bargaining at the tops of their voices. They all seemed to be throwing themselves into the atmosphere of this lively scene in a way which contrasted sharply with the cold formality of the official shops. Here they behaved according to their instincts, wheedling and haggling with a freedom and gusto which, by drawing their minds away from other considerations, may well have acted as a kind of safety-valve.

An enormous woman, her linen head-scarf pushed awry in the heat of discussion, stood holding a sucking-pig—that universal delicacy—lovingly in her arms. She extolled its

good qualities, displayed its tender flesh, christened it with affectionate baby-names—and all to sell it at the highest possible price to somebody whose first act would be to slaughter the animal!

A little farther back some artful dodger drew from a sack some tiny puppies. Dazed by the light and all the noise around them, they promptly disgraced themselves in front of their would-be purchasers. “Five roubles, Comrades. Step a little nearer, Comrades—just look at those beautiful eyes!” It was in all this chatter and laughter, these rare moments of unrestraint, that the people of Russia—a people still close to the soil—revealed their genuine nature.

Birds there were, but these lay far behind the horses, cattle, dogs and pigs, and even then were confined to the more delicate varieties. They stretched out in a long line of miserable little cages, wilting and almost voiceless. From a prison it is hard to sing.

I regained civilisation by stepping off the trolley-bus and into my favourite jeweller’s shop in Mayakovskiy Square. It seemed to me that only here could I see, arrayed in their full splendour, the aquamarines, garnets and precious stones of the Urals and Asia; for the shop struck me as being more unusual—more Russian—than the others, suggesting as it did a break with the tradition symbolised in the treasures of that exclusive commission-shop in the older quarter of Moscow. Here everything bore the stamp of modernity, as did the square in which the shop was situated. I could hear that modern world outside, in the sound of the traffic sweeping down Gorky Street, in the muffled noises of construction as another many-storied building took shape . . . then suddenly I remembered that in the Tchaikovsky Hall at the corner of the square the lovers of traditional songs and dances would already be waiting. It was time for me to join them.

Visits to Moscow shops could thus prove most instructive for any foreigner who wished to observe the Soviet public freely and close at hand. Here were good people, likeable not

so much for their passivity as for their good-heartedness; their childlike nature; their ability to marvel at apparent trifles, which sprang, perhaps, from a refined sense of the wonder of life. They were certainly bound to figure in the calculations of anyone who hoped to understand this birth of a new society.

Despite dialectic materialism the Soviet public were governed by the usual laws of a more general character, and reacted to them in the same way as any other public. A striking example of this occurred towards the end of November, 1947, when a rumour began to circulate that the government was shortly to replace existing bank-notes by new ones. It was not known exactly how this would be achieved, but the idea was disturbing since, in the opinion of the majority, this exchange would not be made on a rouble-for-rouble basis. There was much speculation on the subject.

The stage of rumours and heresay was soon succeeded by one of panic as the public became increasingly obsessed by two considerations: "What are they going to give us in exchange for the roubles we hand in?" and also (perhaps even chiefly), "It's as well not to look as if you possess too many roubles, as this will only attract attention!"

For quite a number of people the situation seemed to threaten real disaster. An old employee remarked to me, "I've done my utmost to economise and put a little by for when I'm no longer able to work. What's going to become of my little nest-egg?" When I replied that he had nothing to worry about since the State would take care of him and that he would have his old-age pension, he made that movement of the hand common to all Russians when they wished to banish some unpleasant idea and declared, "Death will be all I'll have left!" This man's case was the more poignant since the virtue of thrift is not often encountered amongst these people.

The panic which swept through the city resulted in a spate of extravagance and indiscriminate buying—anything to be rid of those old roubles, to stock up with provisions, to acquire goods

which could later be exchanged for the new currency, and so avoid a complete loss of capital. When the goods in the commission-shops, and the Univermaks\* began to run low and finally disappeared entirely, the people went quite crazy and, regardless of price, snapped up even the worst horrors that the bric-à-brac shops had to offer. In the mud and snow (snow blackened by Moscow's eternal coal-dust) the usual queues of waiting people became even broader, even longer, and now began to show signs of impatience and nervousness. Meanwhile, their impassive Government gave no hint of its intentions.

On 15th December we were given details of "an historic act" (the decisions of the Soviet Government were always described as "historic"). This was very cunningly presented and embodied not only the end of all rationing but a cut of approximately 10 per cent in the price of the main consumer goods. At the same time—grudgingly one might have thought—the Finance Administration announced that it would call in the bank-notes in current circulation and give new ones in exchange, at the rate of one new rouble for every ten old ones. Special provisions had been made in the case of Savings Bank money, which would be less affected, and salaries were to remain unaltered, which meant that the people would receive the same number of roubles as before.

The press, though shrill in its praise of this move, which it claimed would bring about a cut in the cost of living, passed over in silence the ruin entailed for those who had been unfortunate enough to possess ready cash. I was irritated by such an attitude.

One consequence of this governmental decree was not long in making itself felt. After the May Day celebrations the Soviet public, having a little spare money in their pockets, made a dash for the shops to take advantage of the derationing which they had seen announced in the newspapers. One

\* Abbreviation for a type of general store or emporium which, theoretically, supplied all commodities.

could hardly blame these good citizens; they were not asking for the moon—only for a little extra in the way of food and clothing. As if at a given signal (and freed now from the constraint of ration cards) they formed great queues at the baker, grocer and Univermak. Within a very short time the same shelves which, since the previous onslaught in November, had been restocked, were once again swept clean. The result was that, after being politely asked to return on the following day, a number of the crowd were obliged to return home empty-handed. The artful ones did return, but well before the time of opening; being the first to enter, they were able to snap up everything available and then proceed, as bold as brass, to the end of the queue where they sold these long-awaited goods at a profit. This little trick was not accomplished without opposition, both vocal and physical, from the crowd; but the result was that, once again, a number of customers remained unserved. The assembled people, quiet and patient at the outset, but now tired of standing in the snow and bitterly cold wind, began to murmur. When a few of the more excitable natures upset a delivery-van loaded with bread, the police, who until then had taken an indulgent view, were obliged to intervene and some rough handling ensued. For some time after this goods were allotted by quota; and thus a system of rationing which a few weeks earlier had been ended with such pomp and ceremony was delicately re-established.

Things were soon normal again; but this little affair served to show that a flagrant shortage of consumer goods existed at the time; that the immediate consequences of the "historic act" had not been thought out systematically; and that, in a given set of circumstances, a Soviet crowd will react in exactly the same way as any other.

One morning a call came through to my office in the French Embassy from the Foreign Relations Section of the Soviet Navy.

"Captain N— speaking. The Chief of Naval General

Staff is ready to receive you now. I'll drop by and pick you up in a few minutes' time. Is that all right with you?"

Of course it was "all right" with me, considering that I myself had requested this interview several months previously; but it was pretty short notice all the same. I fitted myself out appropriately with uniform, decorations and aiglets and at the stated time was driven round to the Soviet naval headquarters. It was a non-committal and wholly unpretentious building of a type which abounded in Moscow and could well have housed the offices of any Soviet governmental service. It certainly had nothing in common with our own Ministry building in the Rue Royale which, despite some dusty nooks and crannies, is so full of a sense of history, tradition and nobility. However, upon entering the door I was reassured by the sight of a number of petty officers in walking-out dress and with boatswains' pipes attached to their waists by white cords. They stood motionless, spaced out along the hall, stairway and the long corridor, and stared fixedly into space whilst beneath their gaze passed the representative of a foreign navy which, on the far-away oceans of the West, had known so many glories and hours of darkness. As I made my way up the imposing stairway (a companion ladder of truly monumental proportions!) I felt that at any moment they would start piping me aboard and that at the end of my climb I would be saluted by the officer of the watch. Things very nearly worked out that way, for at the entrance to a spotless corridor—I nearly said alley-way!—I was in effect greeted by the private secretary who led us into the office of the Chief.

Political feeling was beginning to run high between the Western and Soviet blocks and I was curious to discover in what kind of atmosphere this interview would be conducted. It proved to be unreserved and friendly: the admiral brought back many pleasant memories by describing a visit he had made to France many years before and then, after some observations on the work carried out in Berlin the previous year, concluded by giving me his clearly defined view of international relations.

"You are an officer," he said, "and so am I. We are bound to our respective navies by the call of duty. You will understand me, therefore, when I say that when I am ordered to strike at an enemy I am obliged to do so, and with all the forces at my disposal, no matter who that enemy may be. You understand that?"

"Certainly."

He reached out a hand. "Well then, that's quite clear. So long as there's no fighting to be done, we remain friends."

In this bald statement the true condition of an officer stood expressed.

This period brought me into frequent contact with the Soviet High Command since, upon replacing the Military Attaché, who was then leaving to take up another post in Germany, I had to combine the duties of Naval, Air and Military Attachés. During the course of his farewell visit at Frunze Street my departing colleague deplored the fact that during the whole of his time in Moscow he had been kept in isolation and had never once had the opportunity of meeting Soviet officers other than those of the Foreign Relations Section itself.

A few days later, at six in the evening, the section telephoned through.

"General X--- has invited you to dine with him at eleven tonight in the Hotel Metropole. Is that all right with you?"

It was; although once again, even if no longer surprised, I found it difficult to accustom myself to this brusque and rushed manner of doing things. It was "all right" with the Military Attaché, too, although he was already due to dine elsewhere that evening and the new arrangement would involve his eating two dinners.

With Berlin days still fresh in my mind I could guess that we were in for quite a time of it and that the drinking would be on the liberal side. I therefore took the usual precautions against the next day's hangover: two glasses of hot tea, aspirin and then—since I could not stomach a glassful of medicinal

oil—a piece of bread thickly coated with butter. I had a pretty good idea of what was coming.

These measures were well justified, for the dinner began at the appropriate time and carried on until four the next morning. There were five of us: two generals, a naval captain and we Frenchmen. The meal was copious and included such national delicacies as caviare, sucking-pig and Kiev cutlets—all rather fatty; but the vodka helped—followed by Caucasian wines and Soviet champagne (rather too sweet for my liking). Custom dictated that the vodka should be tossed down with one lift of the hand and the diner had to be prepared to repeat this operation many times with only short intervals for eating. There was no avoiding it.

We were not gathered for the sole purpose of feasting, however. The General, our host, was a highly intelligent and exquisitely mannered young man who, in addition to winning the Military Cross, was also an Officer of the Legion of Honour. He had been informed of the remarks made by the Military Attaché at Frunze Street and was most concerned to place matters in a clearer light. It is always good to speak frankly and so many people seem unaware of the fact that truth and candour are very often the most effective weapons. Perhaps nothing concrete emerged from what turned out to be a long exchange of opinions, but at least this exchange took place and we came to know more clearly just where we stood. Fortunately our conversation was not confined to a fruitless discussion and once our table-companions had said their say they dropped their earlier official manner, gradually relaxed, and by the end of the evening had become men with whom one could converse with genuine interest. Military and naval matters were apparently barred, but there remained another and very absorbing subject—Sovietism.

I learnt a great deal from my hosts of that evening and, whilst maintaining my own views, tried to make myself accessible to their line of reasoning in the hope that they would take into account my reasons for doing so. Our discussion

took an intellectual turn of the highest order. I could not but admire unreservedly the masterly way in which the General dealt with philosophy and also the able manner in which he was supported in this by his two colleagues. I could only conclude that all three were impregnated and supported inwardly by an ideological concept of great strength. This unity of thought, not only in tactical and strategic matters, but also in philosophy, they had acquired at the military school—a fact which accounted for so many of their attitudes and speeches.

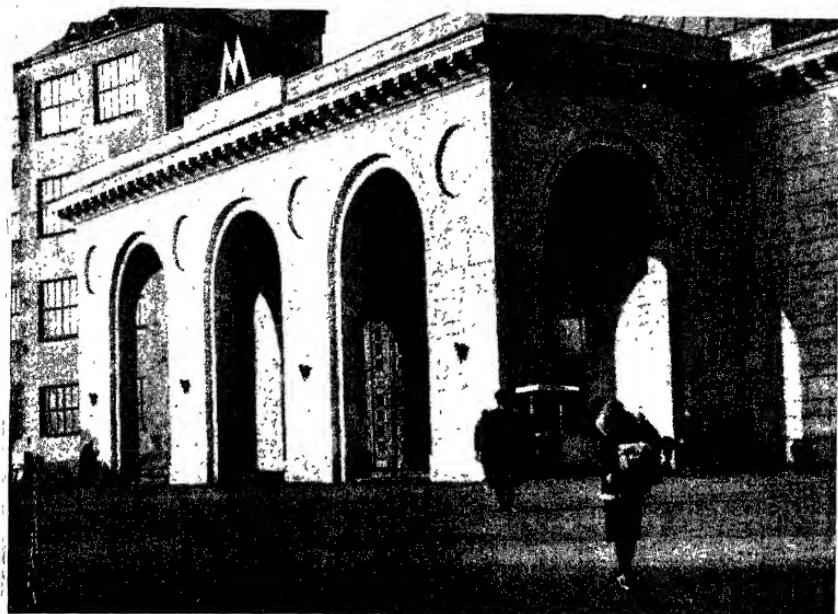
The words flowed on and it seemed unimportant that we were unable to convince each other. We were revelling in the world of ideas (although our toasts were not interrupted on that account). As the party broke up the General declared, "I am a materialist; therefore I am free."

"But you prove nothing by merely repeating an axiom."

"History will prove us right—there's another axiom for you!"

I thought matters over carefully afterwards and came to the conclusion that at this dinner I had been in the presence of the Soviet Man; the same whatever his work or function; whether the uniform which covered his chest was a soldier's, a sailor's, or any one of the others to be found in the Union. Receptive, imaginative, imperturbable, cunning, brutal at times—this was the Slav upon whom somebody had pinned a Communist label. That label forced him to control himself, to choke back his impulses. At the same time it imposed upon him a mode of reasoning; a rigid method of argument which obliged him in the last analysis, and failing further orders, to maintain his various dialectical standpoints at any cost. Far more clearly than in Berlin, where we were all submerged by the pettifogging details of procedure and everyday routine, I could see these characteristics assert themselves. Here was a vital phenomenon: unity; a unity of thought which embraced an enormous population and from which proceeded the further unities of organisation and action.

In unity lay the strength of nations.



TWO OF MOSCOW'S METRO STATIONS





## CHAPTER IV

### Strangers Within the Gates

I HAD not abandoned my projected study of the war at sea, but, in the absence of any official history, was obliged to glean my information painstakingly from a number of different sources. It was all pretty meagre—a series of scrappy accounts and appreciations—and there were times when I felt that my efforts would amount to nothing.

I was anxious to visit Leningrad, if only for the benefit of a little change and to savour once more a seafaring atmosphere; but the difficulty lay in obtaining permission to make the journey. The doyen and heads of the diplomatic missions kept bombarding Minindiel (the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs) with requests for travel permits, but without success; we were repeatedly coming into conflict with the regulations governing foreigners resident in the Union. Persons who had been officially invited to stay in the country were not affected by these and appeared to move in a charmed world where every material problem or difficulty was smoothed out or done away with; but we, who had been obliged by our official duties to undergo long residence in the Soviet Union, found that a strict regulation governed our relations with the institutions of this land and that this, in conjunction with an Official Secrets Act, made it almost impossible for us to have any real contact with the citizens. We were thus left face to face with an all-powerful Government which, by its very nature, was not likely to make things easier for us, and which (since all enterprises in the Union were State-controlled) was ubiquitous. To cope with Burobin alone would have been quite enough!

The following example serves to show what commotion could be caused by any action which deviated slightly from normal.

Since Tass was the official organ for Soviet propaganda, it seemed reasonable to visit their Photographic Section during the course of my humble quest for war illustrations. The building was not imposing but, I thought, so long as the organisation is efficient this hardly matters. I passed through a very grimy door and into an equally dirty corridor, negotiated the usual steps up and down (Soviet corridors are rarely level), and finally entered a dusty little room full of sorters and some rather haughty-looking women who sat at tables. One of these arose gracelessly, asked what I wanted and, without listening to my reply, referred me automatically to her neighbour (so that her own exact function in the place remained dubious). I restated my requirements and was passed on to one of the sorters. I noted the numbers of the pictures I wanted, gave them to this girl (who in the meantime—the eternal feminine!—had set about manicuring her nails) and was asked to call back again in five or six days' time.

When I returned at the stated time she announced tersely, and without so much as lifting her head, "Tomorrow." (Her nails were by now resplendent.) I turned up the following day, as urgent and impatient as if I had been back home in Paris, only to be told that I could not take away with me certain of the reproductions I had ordered. Very rashly (for I still could not bring myself to accept seemingly pointless refusals) I asked the reason.

"I tell you, you can't have Plates X and Y."

"But *why*?"

I was ready to shriek. The bright young thing, without a further glance, shrugged her shoulders and began looking through some file or other. At my side a Comrade Client seemed quite overcome by my appalling ignorance.

So it was true: they did not release portraits of Soviet political leaders, generals, Party members, important adminis-

trators and the rest. Yet—by all that was holy!—to what foul use could these possibly have been put?

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In the Soviet Union, more than in any other country, the foreigner was a being apart. In Sweden, Great Britain and Greece I had always managed to mix comfortably with the local population; provision was always made for the fact that I was a foreigner, but I was accepted and able to express myself with freedom.

Not so in the Soviet Union. Here I was set apart from the inhabitants by the very cut and texture of my clothing, the style of my shoes, the colour of my tie; I had a chauffeur and in front of my house a policeman was continually on duty to keep the doorway clear of pedestrians. As a foreigner I was isolated, not only in Moscow but in the whole of the Soviet Union—a fly in the general ointment! Around me fellow human beings were being slowly drugged by the local propaganda. To resist this intoxication and to preserve my own personality intact I was constantly obliged to draw upon my inner moral and spiritual reserves. This implied isolation from the very Soviet people whom I wished to approach and understand and whose nature I could not conceive as being separate from my own—an estrangement within the very crowd which enveloped me as I left my house or the Embassy. This experience, which I had never before endured in the course of journeys abroad, not only constituted a continual hidden drain on my nervous energy but perhaps gave birth to a little scepticism also. Although surrounded by Soviet people, I could not escape this isolation; it was the ostracism of the leper but without the benefit of solitude.

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Minindiel finally issued to the Diplomatic Corps a list of those sectors where travel was forbidden to foreigners; they included frontier zones, Western Ukraine, Central Asia and a number of other places dotted all over the Union. We assumed that any region not appearing on this list would be

open to us (an assumption which often proved false) and a number of us now looked forward to travelling farther afield.

At this point we came to make the fuller acquaintance of Intourist, which was to travel what Burobin was to everyday life; it not only organised tours but in certain cities arranged hotel accommodation both for foreigners and Soviet citizens. Despite some of the bewildering stories and formalities which attached to its name, this agency worked pretty well and we had no cause to complain of its services. It looked after the traveller and also provided guides who were determined to accompany him everywhere; but for the most part they were interesting people and even if the views they expressed conflicted with those of the client, one had at least to be grateful for their helpfulness and generally cultivated minds.

## CHAPTER V

### Leningrad

**I**T was in July, 1947, that I first took the Red Arrow for the city of Peter the Great, which has now become the city of Lenin; but I was to return there many times and came to conceive a real affection for the place.

Leningrad meant the Neva—a stretch of water as majestic when frozen as under the pale June nights; as noble as the exposed and dilapidated monuments and palaces (those *chateaux de la misère*) which lined its banks, their crumbling walls and crazed façades still touched with beauty and even a little arrogant in their evocation of past splendours. Beside the Neva rose also the Fortress of Peter and Paul, the slim and graceful Admiralty spire and the proud statue of Peter the Great himself (the “Bronze Horseman” of Pushkin), inscribed with the simple legend: *Petro primo: Catherina secunda.*

Big with these past glories, the Neva flowed on to empty itself into the Gulf of Finland, but not before the naval construction yards on its banks had acknowledged the materialism of the present. Two other rivers, the Moika and the Fontanka, contributed almost as much as the Neva to the distinctive character of Leningrad. They were less wide and more akin to canals, but they also had their palaces, their stone bridges and a slightly nostalgic quality (recalling the Seine at Notre-Dame) which lured and held captive those who crossed their bridges, inviting them to pause and savour the sweet passage of time. These waters, which lay like tears upon the city’s face, enveloping, pervading, flowing their slow length beneath

the gentle twilights of the North, exhaled the deep charm and almost emotional aura of Leningrad.

In contrast to Moscow, Leningrad gave me the impression of being a true city. The Nevsky Prospect (a kind of Boulevard des Italiens) was dominated by the distant Admiralty spire; it contained the old pre-Revolution palaces, the Kazan Cathedral and proved a stimulating walk for the visitor. It had not the richness and elegance of European cities nor the carefree abandon of Paris; for me its attraction lay in the people who walked along it, for they all—sailors and civilians alike—had a gaiety unencountered in Moscow. Perhaps this sprang from the latent pride in their hearts that this city of theirs had been the cradle of the Revolution and also an unyielding and heroic bastion in the late war.

The buildings in the Nevsky Prospect had all been replastered and this greatly enhanced the charm of the splendid avenue; here also, for the first time in ages, I came upon a store-window arranged with taste—a display of lingerie. An admirable Prospect indeed!

The Hermitage was a combination of the Louvre, War and Carnavalet Museums and contained some of the finest picture-galleries in the world (although some quite superb canvases were not shown to advantage). Here were also exhibitions of armour, historical reconstructions (particularly relating to Peter the Great), the Hall of the Knights of St. George, costumes, ivories and enamels. I kept clear of the conducted tours and lingered long over the Italian Primitives, the El Grecos, the splendid Rembrandt room and also the wonderful section devoted to French painting, from a Renaissance *Pietà* to the Impressionists. Unfortunately, the Gauguins and an arresting Van Gogh were in the Contemporary Section which for some time had been closed; Intourist asserted that this was owing to repairs and had nothing to do with politics.

The Hermitage embraced the Winter Palace, which likewise had been converted into a museum. To me, however, it seemed

to imply more than this. On whatever my eyes fell—the Neva, the Fortress of Peter and Paul, the palace courtyard or the Alexander Column—I was oppressed by a feeling of unease. I seemed to be drawn back into history, but not as at Versailles, Shoenbrunn, Potsdam or Drottningholm: the ghosts of Louis XIV, Franz-Josef, Frederick II and even, despite his tragic end, of Gustav II, seemed cast in a plausible, classic mould. . . . But this Winter Palace conjured up the more tragic shades of Tsars who had been swept away in the course of the national drama: the drama of Russian man with his deep-rooted craving for an absolute, but an absolute which, despite the genius of the land; despite Peter the Great (killed in the act of saving a commoner); despite Alexander II (murdered by the very people he had tried to save); and now also despite his present rulers, the Orthodox Church and Marx-Leninism, lay ever beyond his attaining.

Other phantoms, but the same melancholy of the Winter Palace, I was to rediscover in the Fortress of Peter and Paul whose solid walls were rooted to the Neva and whose spire reached up to heaven; as if by some tortuous and instinctive process of reasoning, by some twist of the subconscious, the architects had, in these blocks of stone, given concrete expression to the verve and soul of this people and the sombre earthy realities of the regimes which have led them.

Within these fortress walls now stood the wax effigies of a museum—mute witnesses to Russia's past: the Tsars, the Grand Dukes, the Decembrists and those more recent occupants, the Romanovs. Here also, Gorky, in the damp half-light of his cell, wrote one of his finest works entitled, ironically enough, *Children of the Sun*. The sight of these prisoners and gaolers and the consciousness of the drama they represented induced in me a mood which alternated between rapture and utter despair. Here, surely, was a restatement of the symbolism I had encountered in Moscow: the spiritual uplift of the Lenin Mausoleum and the material reality of the Lubianka Prison. Here again was presented the seemingly unchangeable dual aspect of

## SOVIET ENCOUNTER

a people: now gentle, now violent; fatalistic and submissive, yet suddenly mutinous; reaching for the stars and stumbling over straws; throwing open heart and hearth and in the same instant recoiling with suspicion; a people of extremes—true sons of a land where nature also was moved abruptly to extremes of tenderness and brutality. Such a national edifice either attracted the observer or filled him with misgiving, but was one to which nobody could remain indifferent: a true Fortress of Peter and Paul!

The Kirov Theatre (formerly the Marinsky) was similar in size to the Paris Opera. There was no dress-circle and this had the effect of pushing back the balcony and galleries and allowing more room for the stalls and pit. The area of uninterrupted space thus created was most impressive. The seats were handsomely upholstered and comfortable and there were mercifully no usherettes. Both the opera and ballet companies were first-rate—indeed, the citizens of Leningrad claimed that their performances surpassed those of Moscow. Perhaps nobody has yet managed to give a convincing answer to this question, which is apparently a hotly debated one between the two cities, but I was delighted beyond measure to learn that such a rivalry existed. To those who object that such an argument is pointless, I can only say that to me, at least, it came as light relief.

Coming from the theatre one evening, during my second stay in Leningrad, I decided to return to my lodgings by another route, and instead of following the Moika up to the Nevsky Prospect, to turn into an avenue hitherto unknown to me, but along which I had no doubt that I could find my way easily enough. Finally, when well and truly lost, I was obliged to ask my way of a woman who was passing by.

“I’ll take you as far as the Nevsky,” she said. “I happen to be going to Zheliabov Street. It’s quite easy—you’ll see.”

She was plain, badly dressed, and a handkerchief flapped loosely round her head. She possessed, however, a lively,

intelligent air. As we strolled along together she talked very freely and from time to time a stirring quality entered her voice. Simply and unemphatically she spoke of the German siege of Leningrad, as of a terrible ordeal now past but one which had left an enduring mark upon the lives of those who had lived through it. In her manner of speaking she reminded me of the soldiers of Verdun; they also spoke simply, almost complacently, and without bitterness, of the inferno through which they had so mercifully passed. It seemed that, when the moment of horror was over, man remained conscious above all of the glory and prestige in which he personally could claim a share.

Of the siege itself this woman harboured only the memories of extreme hunger and cold. The bombardments, the guns, the soldiers roaring by in tanks, the civilians detailed to work on the roads and in the factories and trenches—all these duties, stern and onerous as they were, seemed in the nature of things. But the cold; the hunger! I could see the phantom of horror lurk in her eyes as she described the unheated rooms, the pitiful rations, the agonizing pains of hunger; men, paralysed with cold, who, in spite of their courage, were forced suddenly to lay down their tools in the middle of work; and others who fell, killed, not by bullets, but by famine.

“But,” she concluded, “our city held on!”

I could only admire the quiet heroism of this poor creature, sister to those thousands of others who also had “held on” in this city of Leningrad.

“And now?” I asked.

“Now? Well, it could never be as bad as that again. We go on working quietly, we have enough to eat and we are alive. What else really matters?”

Throughout her conversation I had heard no reference to the Soviet leaders who directed the city’s defence; to the famous supply-route from the East; to the directives of the Party, to Communist principles or to the might of the Soviet nation. She had come out with no high-sounding phrases, but had

described in her own way details of her daily life and the struggle for existence itself. These were the harsh lines of a drama written 'by the hand of Fate. Once the danger' was over her own suffering had been offered as a flower for the garlanding of her city. This woman, who reflected the image of a nation which had endured, had spoken with pride of "our city." Others might later, and with good reason, recall the revolutionary traditions of Leningrad and the Communist faith of Comrade Zhdanov, but for my guide of that autumn evening these were not the heart of the matter.

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Leningrad brought me once more into a naval atmosphere, but curiously enough the Admiralty building itself, a powerful, solid structure extending along the Neva bank, had the effect of drawing me into the past. Its exceptionally graceful spire beckoned to the passing traveller; beneath it the cannons, the anchors and the chains provided relics of a bygone age, while the building itself presented a sharp contrast to that symbol of the new era—the naval headquarters in Moscow!

I could never tire of bathing in the gentle charm and beauty of Leningrad, which from all angles and at all seasons I found most moving. A stone, a smell, a trick of light, the rediscovery of a familiar environment itself, were enough to set me musing upon memories of the past—those memories which, in a middle-aged person, tend to multiply until later, in an attempt to cling to a fleeting life, they crowd in relentlessly to the exclusion of the present.

Such memories became especially strong as I passed the Dzerjinsky and Frunze Naval Schools; the Dzerjinsky, for engineers, was situated on one side of the Neva, while the Frunze lay on the other, with its huge façade separated from the river by just a broad avenue and the quay itself. I used to stop often before the little fleet of longboats, launches and whale-boats belonging to this establishment and, with the silent, eager children, watch the conscientious sailors at their halystoning. Nearby were anchored trawlers which probably

were used for the shorter training cruises, while, in the middle distance, a big three-master lay at her moorings.

A class of cadets approached and then, wheeling skilfully and with astonishing regularity and precision, entered the school with slow, measured tread. It was hard to tell whether they were senior or first-year cadets, for their training lasted four years and there was no instruction school, such as we have in France. The frozen winter sea made exercises impossible, and these cadets had to rely for their practical experience on the prolonged training cruises of the summer, their winter months being devoted to theoretical work and also the detailed study of Marx-Leninism. Even these summer cruises were undertaken only in the closed circuit of Soviet waters; for these young men there was to be no contact with foreign lands, no day-dreaming under the spell of tropical islands—no glimpse of a world other than the Soviet. The only link which bound them to their fellow-sailors of other lands was the sea itself. This factor made the attitude I had encountered in their naval superiors easier to understand.

They passed by me with the proud, determined look and almost mechanical stiffness which are a feature of military schools throughout the world; I knew that when I saw them on the Nevsky Prospect the following Sunday with their walking-out dress and cutlasses, they would be as artless and as painstakingly casual as their fellow-cadets in Great Britain, Sweden and France.

Beyond the school I could see some other launches. Their bows were flared to withstand heavy seas and their bridges were heavily protected after the manner of fighting craft. I was surprised to notice that, in spite of their heavy armament (hooded guns and heavy machine-guns), they were flying the red flag of the Merchant Navy; but the mystery cleared when I discovered that these craft were attached to the maritime frontier-police. It seemed a powerful force with which to guard a coastline where, theoretically, nothing ever happened, unless the rumours were true that people escaped from the

Soviet Union and across the Baltic to other countries. In that event they had good reason to give chase.

Downstream, towards the mouth of the Neva, I could see the hulls, masts and turrets of the cruisers, destroyers and submarines lying at anchor before shipyards, where more of their kind were under construction. I thought of the words of the admiral with whom I had recently spoken in Moscow:

“Name the enemy and we strike—strike hard!”

## CHAPTER VI

### The First of May

THIS was the major celebration of the year and one which, to a certain degree, had succeeded in replacing Easter. There was, of course, November 7th, the anniversary of the Revolution, but one could hardly be expected to rejoice heart and soul in the middle of winter, standing in the rain and snow! May Day was far more suitable and had, moreover, come to be recognised throughout the world as an occasion for festivity, whether on account of the Workers, the International, or simply as with us in France, the advent of spring flowers.

In the Soviet Union preparations were made well in advance. In Moscow, where I attended the celebrations each year, the damage caused by a long winter made it especially desirable to brighten the face of the city; the shop-fronts had lost their brightness, the hoardings were discoloured, the lamp-posts wore a kind of bleached look. All these things called for paint, and plenty of it! Gangs now arrived on the scene equipped with big brushes set on the end of long poles; these were the so-called painting experts. Women, who for once appeared to have escaped the heavier manual work, started rubbing over these shop-fronts, hoardings and lamp-posts and then, dispensing with such preliminaries as scraping, cleaning, scaling or red lead, proceeded to adorn them with red, green or yellow paint. The rain continued to fall, thinning out the whole surface, so they slapped on a little more paint and the job was done. What did it matter so long as everything looked bright on the day!

In much the same spirit the authorities made a special

effort to complete any construction work which had been lagging. For months a building site at the corner of Petrovka and Kuznetsky Most stood silent and deserted behind its hoardings, but then, suddenly, it became a hive of industry: bulldozers, lorries and concrete-mixers rumbled and roared there day and night. Men were everywhere, digging levelling, building, and to swell their ranks still further even soldiers worked as masons and labourers. One felt that in a matter of days a huge building would spring up out of nothing. But why delay before taking this work in hand? Why the sudden rush and such hasty measures? Heaven only knew!

This instance served to illustrate, however, one of the advantages possessed by the regime: in one fell swoop it could conscript workers, apparently without concern for their personal convenience, and embark upon projects in a climate of prodigality where such factors as working hours, costs, wear and tear of equipment, were considered of minor importance. In this way, by fits and starts, it proceeded to the fulfilment of some theoretical target. The obstinacy and tenacity with which it did this, together with the vast, if at times crude resources upon which it drew, ensured it at least the elements of that success later to be vaunted in its propaganda.

Since the two main attractions on May Day were the military parade and the workers' demonstration, preparations for it were not confined to painters and labourers. The aim was to give an impression of both military and civil might, and thus the whole population found itself involved. For a good month before the day itself various formations could be observed rehearsing day and night on every available open space in the city. Commanded by a general, complete with sword, field officers (for the most part unattached and drawn from the military schools) went through the same drill as a raw recruit: marching in step, marking time, wheeling, back and forth, all with the utmost solemnity. It was hard to imagine French Staff Officers undergoing a similar ordeal on the Champ-de-Mars under the quizzical eye of Parisian onlookers!

But in Moscow and in Leningrad this was no laughing matter.

Elsewhere, after their day's work at the factories, men and women alike were putting in extra hours at marching. To the rear the ranks of women were a little confused, but at the head of the column their more vigorous sisters strode along, swinging their arms from side to side, bosoms heaving, shoulders thrusting forward, tense, sweating freely, and seemingly united in a kind of feminine obstinacy as their feet beat out a measured tread on the crumbling tarmac. It was quite stirring!

From about April 23rd onwards general rehearsals took place on Red Square, with lorries, cars, tanks and artillery. To cause as little disruption as possible, these were held at night. At about one in the morning traffic was halted and, amidst an appalling uproar, the grouping of units and the march-past began. People on their way home—and in Moscow this is not considered a late hour—were obliged to make fantastic detours, while those who had been sleeping were awakened, and kept awake, by the noise of tanks and lorries. No one dreamed of complaining, however, knowing that the result would fully repay any temporary discomfort.

The great day dawned, fine and sunny as always.\* I set off, armed with an official invitation and a safe-conduct for my car, which I was instructed to leave in front of the Lenin Museum. At each of the five check-points *en route* I was asked to produce my identity-card and sometimes an explanation as to the spelling of my name since, owing to the difficulties of transcribing from the Latin into the Russian script, the names on identity-card and invitation did not always tally.

Stands for foreigners had been erected on the Red Square round about the Lenin Mausoleum. On the one side were

\* In the Orthodox Church Easter Day is reckoned according to the Julian Calendar and can coincide with May 1st of the Gregorian Calendar, now officially adopted in the U.S.S.R. Thus, church-goers, emerging from a Midnight Mass where Stalin has been the subject of their prayers, have been able, a few hours later, to take part in a workers' demonstration testifying to their leader's glory, and so render with striking promptitude to both God and Caesar!

packed the Diplomatic Corps and on the other military attachés who, although less crowded, did not mingle; indeed, those representing the satellite countries kept strictly to themselves. The remaining stands contained a sprinkling of Party and Municipal guests. Except at the United States Embassy the surrounding windows were empty; the roofs of all other buildings were dotted with policemen, while overhead a small reconnaissance plane circled slowly.

Three minutes before the great Kremlin clock boomed ten Stalin slowly mounted to the terrace of the Mausoleum, followed by the leaders of the Politburo and several chosen disciples. He acknowledged the applause with a salute and then took his place in the centre with military officials on his right and civilians on his left. Almost automatically I and the other attachés turned to gaze at this group of men in whose hands the fate of the whole world might well lie.

Stalin resembled his official portrait so closely that it was almost as if by force of association the man and his pictorial symbol had become one, individual facial characteristics being submerged in the process. The placing of his entourage provided matter for much involved speculation amongst press correspondents. From the mere order of precedence they could not resist drawing a great variety of conclusions concerning current political trends and the relative power of the Soviet leaders.

There was Molotov, bespectacled, calm and severe-looking. It seemed as though he were only waiting for the ceremony to finish so that he could once more bury himself in a dossier. Malenkov, small and chubby-looking in his cap and Revolution-style uniform, seemed very aware of all that was going on and from time to time waved a large hand in the direction of the crowd. He bore a close resemblance to those secret anarchists whose exploits figured so largely in the adventure stories of my youth; and yet I found myself wanting to bundle him off to a doctor to have something done about that superfluous fat. It would certainly have improved his appearance. Nearby was



A MAY DAY PROCESSION

THE KREMLIN FROM KAMENNY BRIDGE, MOSCOW





Beria, looking as if he would be more at home in the role of a Levantine business man, or perhaps behind a baccarat table at Monte Carlo. When I reflected that he had held his present position for over ten years, whereas his predecessors achieved an average of only six or seven, I could not restrain a kind of grudging admiration for the man. A small neat beard revealed Bulganin. My own feeling was that this man might prove to be the most honest and human of them all. Mikoyan . . . Kaganovich . . . Shvernik . . . and then the Marshals Koniev and Sokolovsky, the latter a man of strong and subtle character whom I knew already from Berlin days.

Events began with a military review. The Parade Marshal on horseback emerged from the Kremlin, was met by the troop commander and these two figures proceeded to move down the lines to the accompaniment of military music. Before each formation they halted and saluted; the men responded with some words shouted in unison following this with a vast roaring "Hurrah." As the Marshal and his party proceeded down the seemingly endless line of units these successive cries swelled, diminished, and rose again; a prolonged and moving sound, born of the steppes which gave these soldiers birth; a vast salutation for the man who led their fathers to victory. It was a sound as stirring as in those early days of the 1914-18 war, when we French first heard it rise from the throats of our big blond Russian allies.

There followed the inevitable speech, rounded off by a eulogy of Stalin (who appeared quite unmoved), a salute of guns, the almost interminable National Anthem, and finally the march-past. This was perfection itself. Every conceivable military formation took part: gay-looking cavalry, artillery, naval and air force units and tanks. Beneath rows of tense faces brilliant new tunics moved forward as if in a solid block; below these tunics legs rose and fell stiffly and boots crashed to the ground with something approaching savagery. What with the decorated colours, the flashing of swords, the hoarse cries of command and the combined music of several hundred

instrumentalists, all this formed a most magnificent spectacle which reached its height of splendour with the playing of the old Preobrazhensky Regimental March, as triumphant now as in the old days of the Russian Empire.

Last of all came the civilian units, who got off to a flying start with the beating of big drums and the music of a brass band whose members sported new flannel uniforms and canvas shoes. After them came factory workers, carrying enormous placards bearing the portraits of well-known Communist leaders, ranging from Stalin and Zhdanov to Dmitrov, Maurice Thorez and Mao Tse Tung. Their well-spaced columns seemed to fill the Square as they moved along, encouraged by the persistent bellowing of the loudspeaker, cheering, shouting, laughing—at times almost dancing—their necks craned in the direction of the Mausoleum, and hoping to catch a glimpse of “Him.” At first the procession was fairly orderly, but before an hour had passed, and with perhaps another four or five hours to go, it had become almost a rabble.

In the evening there was dancing in the streets, during which women more often than not partnered one another. Men and women alike revealed an innate sense of rhythm which seemed to make light of their somewhat bulky forms, and the whole scene was one of movement and gaiety. When night fell all the monuments were illuminated. There appeared to be no attempt at indirect lighting, but perhaps this was as well, since although this type of lighting may enhance the patina of some stone surfaces, Moscow brickwork was hardly likely to show to advantage beneath it. The day's festivities ended with a giant firework display long after which an enormous portrait of Stalin, attached to a captive balloon and held in the beams of searchlights, could be seen hovering over the city.

The following day also was a holiday, but on May 3rd, as if to remind the bleary-eyed citizens of Moscow that the bricks and mortar of Socialism (and possibly the cost of May Day celebrations themselves!) cannot be paid for with junketing,

details of a new Construction Loan appeared in the public press. This was always to the tune of several thousand millions of roubles and was launched in the form of 4 per cent shares. Echoes of France!

The amount of the Loan never seemed to vary, which suggested that the régime either regarded it as a constant and recurring need, or else, through it, hoped to exploit the enthusiasm of people who had lately celebrated May Day. The idea of the latter possibility shocked me deeply, but apparently did not worry anybody else; on the contrary, all the procedure connected with the launching of this loan was vested with such dignity and importance that it might almost have been regarded as a direct continuation of the celebrations themselves. The newspapers featured photographs of humble workers or beaming old ladies donating large sums of money to the cause, while whole columns were written in praise of the great and generous Soviet people who, with such cheerful hearts, were prepared to pour their mites into the coffers of the State.

To give a clear indication of the amount expected from each citizen a sliding scale of dues was published. This was graded according to the salary earned by the contributor, who had merely to go to a table, state his code number, and permit monthly deductions to be made automatically from his salary. A "stooge" (there was really no other word for it) might start the ball rolling by declaring rapturously, "I'm giving six weeks' salary!" Those following him felt morally bound to do no less and thus the régime was assured of this minimum contribution from every citizen, except perhaps in the case of the poorest.

## CHAPTER VII

### From Day to Day

AFTER the first, long, unsettled months my life in the Soviet Union began to fall into place and eventually came to assume two distinct aspects: on the one hand my work at the office and in diplomatic circles; on the other my abiding preoccupation with the immense richness and variety of the Soviet scene around me—a scene which I sought to understand and enter by every means open to me.

In order to do this more fully and to counteract the demands made upon me in my official capacity, I used to go for long walks through the Moscow streets or any other place frequented by the public in or around the city; or, occasionally, to satisfy my love of wandering, undertake journeys farther afield. For several weeks each year I took a holiday abroad, spending part of the time in Sweden, Greece, Turkey, or some other country, and saving the remainder for France; I would then return from the highlights of the West with my heart full of memories and vague regrets (and carrying with me also a fair supply of clothes, wines and champagne). Once back in Moscow I would resume my two-fold life, with perhaps an occasional brief thought for Chartres, Delphi, Mycenae or the skyline of Istanbul.

People cannot work non-stop all their lives, even for the establishment of Socialism, and, when rest-days or regular holidays came to interrupt their long hours of labour, the Soviet citizens took advantage of the various entertainments at their disposal—facilities in which the resident foreigner also was able to share.

Theatrical productions throughout the Union were of exceptional interest and in Moscow itself achieved an especially wide range and variety. Whether at the Opera, the Komsomol (Young Communist League), the Maly, or any other theatre, one could be assured of extremely good acting, even if, as elsewhere in the world, some of the plays themselves were without merit. As at the Comédie Française in Paris, I favoured above all the classical productions.

The repertoire, which was revived every season, was first-class. The presentations of Gogol, Chekov, Ostrovsky and Tolstoy in particular had great style and dramatic impetus; but it would perhaps be kinder to pass over in silence those terrible "flops" (acclaimed by propaganda as masterpieces), so utterly devoid of dramatic sense and whose sole concern was to follow the Communist line. Unless condemned *ex cathedra* beforehand for ideological deviation, these had a way of slipping quietly out of the repertoire. It is likewise better not to speak of the stage-adaptations of novels; a gift for synthesis is notoriously lacking in the Soviet make-up and, since the novels themselves were already lengthy enough, the plays based upon them seemed quite endless. Despite such superb acting and presentation, a performance of *Resurrection* or *Anna Karenina* would bore any normally constituted Frenchman to tears, particularly if he had experienced the drama and intensity of the Paris production of *Crime and Punishment*. The comparison revealed an essential divergence between the two countries in both thought and conception of life.

Nevertheless, it was the Bolshoi Theatre, with its ballet and opera, which provided me with my moments of greatest joy. *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella*, *The Fountain of Bakhgshi Sarai* and *Giselle*, to mention only the better known, were purest delights of music, grace and harmony. (Galina Ulanova is probably the foremost ballerina in the world and is almost equalled by Lapishinskaya and another young dancer from Leningrad). Unfortunately, this classical purity—inspired by

the French School of Marius Petipas—showed signs of being supplanted by the ballet of propaganda; the stage-sets were as beautiful as ever, the *corps de ballet* as graceful, but in place of the old enchantment there reigned a feeling of tension. The mediocrity of compositions such as *The Flames of Paris*, *Red Poppy* (set in China), and *The Bronze Horseman* (from a poem by Pushkin) served to enhance yet further the beauty of the others.

The Opera chorus was excellent, the basses in particular being very impressive. The most popular works were *Eugene Onegin*, *Queen of Spades*, *Ivan Susanin* (formerly *A Life for the Tsar*), *Boris Godunov*, *Prince Igor* and *Carmen*. Yes, *Carmen*! The Soviet people appeared to have a marked preference for Spanish themes and *Carmen* satisfied to the full Moscow's conception of Spanish life. Incidentally, the *pas espagnol* was nearly always adopted, even in ballets of the most classical type, such as *Swan Lake* and *Cinderella*; whether this was due to mere whim or to the dictates of some unconscious repression is a question which might best be decided by a psychoanalyst!

Whatever the work being performed, I was struck by the lavishness of the production and stage-sets, which seemed to continue in the tradition begun by Bakst and Baty. The *décor* was correct in every detail, the lighting effects calculated to a nicety; everything had been accomplished in the way of visual magic to plunge the spectator into an appropriate atmosphere. When the curtain went up on *Boris Godunov* to reveal the most grandiose scenic effect of them all, the audience broke into applause, so moved were they by the sheer beauty of the spectacle.

Soviet theatre-goers were very susceptible and would surrender themselves completely to their emotions—doubtless as an escape from the world of materialism in which they were obliged to live. At the end of an act they would clap, stamp their feet and even rush forward to the edge of the stage in order to see and greet at closer range those artists who, by

voice, expression and acting ability had kindled an emotion of such power and loveliness. When I saw the good Soviet public moved to open their hearts so utterly—responding to the voice of beauty in such a spontaneous and childlike manner—I felt able to forgive them their at times offensive lack of ceremony.

I visited the theatre frequently, although to do this was not always easy for the foreigner, who was obliged to apply for his seat, in writing, to the theatre manager. Upon arrival I would install myself in a ground-floor box or perhaps join my fellow-diplomats in some specially reserved section of the theatre. There was the usual noise of assembled theatre-goers, but as a rule this did not continue long, since the doors were shut very shortly before the performance and, once this had begun, were not re-opened until the first interval. So much the worse for the latecomer! The audience seemed completely absorbed in the performance and poured their whole being into this act of attention; if, on rare occasions, the silence was broken, it was only by the subdued remarks of people who had been carried away by their enthusiasm.

During the seemingly endless intervals common to the Soviet theatre I stationed myself on the settee in the middle of the foyer and from here was able to study people from a position of advantage. It was almost as if I were witnessing an additional piece of theatre. Around they walked—those who had not retired to the buffet—slowly, in couples, exchanging an occasional word and observing those who in their turn observed them: the large General, smothered in decorations, with his stately spouse; a young lady with shining eyes, on the arm of her naval escort, a lieutenant, complete with dirk;\* the honest factory worker, filled with pride (yet also somewhat overcome) by his wife's evening-dress; young and old they wheeled around me in leisurely circles. From time to time some of the couples would leave the procession to obtain some ice, ham or a cake from the buffet, and then return to

\* Carried by Soviet Naval officers as in the days of the Imperial Russian Navy.

continue this perambulation until the bell rang, their minds full of the play, the actors—or, perhaps, merely some neighbour's dress!

It was, administratively speaking, rather easier to get into the concerts than into the theatres and I took full advantage of this fact. Each time I entered the Conservatoire, where they were usually held, the sailor in me paid homage to the portrait of Rimsky-Korsakov in naval uniform, which hung there in a place of honour together with the other great composers of his time.

The performances were extremely good. The orchestra was obviously hard-working and conscientiously rehearsed; the soloists—such as Oistrakh and Oborin—were artists of the first rank, and there were two excellent conductors (one of whom I had seen in Leningrad). The programmes themselves, well conceived and balanced, contained, in addition to the usual classics, works by Russian composers new and old. Tchaikovsky appeared to enjoy both official and popular favour.

During the interval, or before the concert itself, a learned young woman would often give explanatory details concerning the evening's programme in a room set aside for this purpose, and sometimes would run through on the piano the structural elements of the concerto or symphony later to be played—another instance of the concern for the musical and artistic education of a public who, where music was concerned, provided a peculiarly receptive field. For those without programmes and who had not attended these little sessions, another and very practical arrangement was in force: before a work was played the title and movements would be announced as well as the name and qualifications of the conductor himself.

On other occasions there might be an introductory biographical talk on the composer in question. I once heard a long dissertation on Mozart who—if one were to believe the lecturer—would without doubt have been a Communist, had he only lived in the twentieth century! For lecture-concerts

of this type the prices of admission were lowered, possibly as a sop to the audience, since the talks themselves were nearly always long-winded affairs.

However, in spite of the distractions afforded by the theatre, the concerts and the varied street-scenes of Moscow, I soon found myself longing to escape from the confines of the city—to breathe a different air and join all those other people who on Sundays left for the country. The idea seemed reasonable enough, but proved to be little more than a fond hope; apparently it was no more permitted for a foreigner to move about in the country surrounding the capital than it was for him to journey to other parts of the Soviet Union.

My original idea had been to take a run out as far as a car would permit, but I had to give up this idea when we were restricted to a radius of about thirty miles—a range which was progressively reduced and, moreover, limited to certain stated roads. Until 1948, however, thirty miles was thirty miles, and enabled me to escape to peace and quiet. For these expeditions I used to choose a week-day—a procedure which dumbfounded my chauffeur, who was a stickler for established routine.

One day, during my first winter, I journeyed by bus along the Mozhaisk road and descended at a point situated between the forest and plain. The landscape was covered by beautiful, newly-fallen snow. As I stood in the middle of the road a countryman passed me, pulling a small sledge. Beneath the frosted pines a peasant's hut, a rather dilapidated yet solid dwelling, seemed to radiate warmth. The sun itself was now beginning to set; a sun charged with that same intense cherry-red which I had seen tinting other snows in Finland and Sweden. It was a landscape of solemn frozen grandeur. Standing alone in the heart of this great silence I felt myself to be in the presence of that ancient and still unanswered enigma—the land of Russia.

I have long loved snow and the snow-covered landscapes of the Northern countries and this seems strange, for in the

French Navy "service abroad" conjures up a picture of tropical seas and the islands of the southern hemisphere. These also I have seen; but ten winters of my life have been passed in the frozen lands; a very different setting, no doubt, but one which exerted a fascination no less powerful.

I found myself drawing comparisons between this Muscovite plain and similar places I had known. There was, after all, no difference between the sleigh which rumbled along the frozen road here and the one drawn by a horse over the frontier in Finland: and the man who rode in it was linked to his Finnish brother by their guardianship of these snow-covered fields and the common struggle against the climate. Slowly and silently each passed down his country road, his mind lost perhaps in the thought of next Sunday's drinking party, or else subdued and surrendered to the surrounding elements.

From time to time skiers crossed my path. The terrain provided these people with no opportunities for acrobatics, no mountainous slopes and mechanical lifts; they travelled over flattish ground, threaded their way amongst the trees and, in common with their counterparts in similar plains and forests beyond the Soviet frontier, often travelled great distances by this means. It was basic skiing of the type I myself loved.

In the spring I visited Kolomenskoi, situated in the neighbourhood of Moscow and overlooking a bend in the Moskva river; it was famous for its reconstruction of an old-type village and also of a house once inhabited by Peter the Great in the North. I found these dwellings of bygone days quite delightful and refreshingly remote from the world of factories, statistics and standardisation. A peasant woman guided me around the place; she came out with her set piece from time to time, but did so with discretion and tact. She had a soft voice and her smile a wistful quality—a true countrywoman, who paid her daily due of toil and sacrifice to the new gods in whom she hardly believed and, mercifully, had only the remotest idea of "culture" as it was understood in the neighbouring capital.

In June, 1948, before the sudden ban on travelling, I went with the Embassy Counsellor, our wives and my two sons to visit the Moskva battlefield; a trip undertaken as much to satisfy our natural curiosity as Frenchmen as to provide our children with a memorable history lesson.

After an uneventful journey by way of Mazhaisk, our two cars reached the village of Borodino, the scene of the battle, and about seventy miles from Moscow. But how small it was! It is hard to conceive how two great armies found room to face each other in an area so confined and featureless. As we moved amongst the monuments dedicated to the various regiments—mute witness to the ferocity of a battle in which more than 90,000 men perished—a feeling of emotion welled up within us. This was not the Marne or Verdun; but were not the gallantry and heroism of the same order?

A very pleasant and well-informed young curator conducted us around the local museum. He treated us to the Soviet version of the battle and with great fervour described the Russian manœuvre which led to the victory of Borodino for the forces of Emperor Alexander. I have heard other historians speak with equal fervour of Napoleon and claim success for his army—to wit, the victory of Moskva. Moskva or Borodino? Napoleon or Kutuzov? Perhaps Tolstoy was right when, in *War and Peace*, he claimed that nobody could arrest or deflect the course of war once the apparatus was in motion: the victor and the vanquished were as one.

In the smoke-filled refreshment-room we found ourselves back in the contemporary scene. Around us sat ragged peasants, drinking tea and vodka and smoking their abominable cigarettes, sometimes made with *makborka*, a black tobacco of inferior quality which they would roll in newspaper. For them we represented quite a curiosity, with our hats, ties, our toe-capped shoes and our children (unlike their own) dressed in shorts and socks. Our womenfolk, too, were wearing dresses of two different colours! Perhaps they dismissed these quaintly garbed creatures as members of a declining

race, but they certainly eyed with something akin to alarm and wonder the great variety of our fare (we had brought our own provisions) and the quantity of roubles which passed between us and the proprietor.

Cinemas, which abounded in Moscow and other Soviet cities, were regarded as evidence of culture; indeed, the rating of a town depended partly upon the number of cinemas it possessed. Even before rehousing shack-dwellers along the Volga, Stalingrad proceeded to the construction of a new cinema which was to surpass the finest that Moscow had to offer, complete with foyer, buffet and a room especially devoted to chess-players.

Films in the Union fulfilled a cultural role and, since the heresy of "art for art's sake" had been officially condemned by Zhdanov in 1948, their sole purpose was to reveal the mind of the State and indicate to the public the line it should be following. Everything was relegated to this end. The propaganda was ceaseless and single-minded; its quality would be in turn insinuating, open, aggressive, yet capable of adapting itself at any given moment in order to deal with the most discontented or obtuse audiences. This controlled culture, apparent even in good films such as those dealing with the Ukraine or Siberia, left a disagreeable taste in the mouth.

After those which dealt with Soviet achievements, war films were the most prevalent, followed by films with the October Revolution as their subject; they contained nothing but massacres, carnage, bombardments, assassinations and acts of revenge—material which, in spite of skilled production and the artistic achievement of Eisenstein, could hardly be termed attractive. Some foreign films were shown—German, Italian, and even French and American—but these were frequently condensed, cut and adapted to the purposes of propaganda. The cinemas were always full, although a seat in the stalls might imply nothing more than a folding bench. Fortunately smoking was not permitted.

With regard to films, the diplomatic corps benefited from a well-established custom and, through the good offices of the Cultural Relations Section, were enabled to attend a private showing of major films before these were generally released—an institution which kept us abreast of the times. These occasions provided opportunities for meeting fellow-diplomats and also our Soviet colleagues. An air of ceremony at the entrance made it clear that this was no everyday occasion but something more in the nature of a gala performance at which we were the privileged spectators—guests of a higher authority which was fully acquainted with the correct ordering of such functions. By this means I saw *The Fall of Berlin*, *The Battle of Stalingrad*, and a film on Siberia; they were very good but lasted long enough to make me appreciate the comfort of my seat!

In Moscow itself I saw several films which featured the Navy, but which were concerned not so much with the present day or the late war as with ramming home lessons of patriotic or revolutionary content. Such were the films featuring Admiral Ushakov, the defence of Sebastopol against the French and English, the cruiser *Varyag* (sunk at Chemulpo at the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War), the sailors of Kronstadt and also the well-known *Battleship Potemkin*. The Navy thus presented to the eyes of the public was made to appear as a force dedicated not only to the defence of the country but also to revolutionary action; indeed, the accent tended to be placed upon this latter aspect, not only in the cinema but in the general tradition of the régime. Was not the date of the October Revolution itself—that dawn of a new era—announced by a shot fired from the cruiser *Aurora* upon the Winter Palace in Petrograd? During my trips to Leningrad I had often gazed upon the slender funnels, and the antiquated lines and armament of this same *Aurora*, as it lay moored to a quay on the Neva. It was now a museum.

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The Soviet public were great frequenters of museums and

one of my first visits, shortly after my arrival in Moscow, was to the Lenin Museum, where admission is free. Here, in the course of a long series of superbly arranged galleries, the life and accomplishments of Lenin were catalogued, from his earliest infancy, through the days of the Revolution and until his death. The visitor was given the full treatment: Lenin as a child, Lenin as a student, Lenin as a man; his writing-desk, his watch, his wig. . . . Of Trotsky and the famous sealed railway carriage by means of which the Germans introduced the two revolutionary leaders into Russia, no mention was made; doubtless the matter had been overlooked, or perhaps considered to be historically unimportant. I swiftly tired of this continual and progressive deification and found myself longing for the mystery and solemnity of the Mausoleum in Red Square. The Lenin Museum was worth a visit, however, if only to witness the rapt attitude of the citizens when confronted with the relics of the Founder of the Soviet Union; or the utterly complacent look of well-marshalled groups of children and adults as they studied the explanatory texts or listened to the measured, emphatic voice of their guide as he first advanced premises which not one of them would dream of challenging and then, aided by a rigorous logic, proceeded to conclusions of a most far-fetched character. When one reflected that the same premises and the same deductions were paraded before these people in their study circles, in the press and on the radio, it was not hard to understand how the thoughts of the average Soviet man were indistinguishable from those of his neighbour; how he had become incapable of conceiving a mode of life or expression other than the one advocated by the authorities. What more natural, than that he should accept as an article of faith "One Guide, One Party, One Soviet People"?

Other museums, however, more closely resembled our own and Moscow even possessed a Museum of Western Art which contained some very attractive exhibits. (Although these could not compare with those of the Hermitage, in Leningrad.)

For a number of months this museum was given over to an exhibition of presents which had been donated to Stalin on the occasion of his seventieth birthday (21st December, 1949).

I enjoyed visiting the Tretyakov Gallery, which was devoted exclusively to Russian and Soviet paintings from the earliest primitives and Rublev icons to the present day. The icons embodied an intense Byzantine spirituality which, as the years moved on and the artists themselves became separated from their prime inspiration, could be seen to stiffen quite rapidly into conventional forms. I found the enormous fussy compositions of Ivanov and the canvases of those nineteenth-century painters who aped the French School wearying both to the eye and spirit. Several of the pictures held my attention, however, in particular a starkly tragic *Golgotha*. Unfortunately the entire collection was rounded off with a glorification of contemporary Stalinist painters.

In these frescoes and icons I sensed the full impact of Byzantine art. Shining through them I discerned two main qualities: light, and also the gentle humanity of the Virgin herself. The feasts of Easter and the Transfiguration share an essentially luminous quality and only in the East are they convincingly celebrated. These tender and maternal attitudes of the Virgin—the inclination of the head, the movement of the arms—were features common to Oriental art and the Russian icon; to Mistra and Constantinople. (These several strands of Byzantine art have been splendidly drawn together in that monument of research, the works of V. N. Lazarev.) The Tretyakov Gallery, the icons, the art of Byzantium, for me represented an escape from the world of mechanics, dollars and the atom bomb—a return visit to Saint Sophia, Delphi, Sicily. Here was a holiday abroad which I could enjoy in Moscow itself!

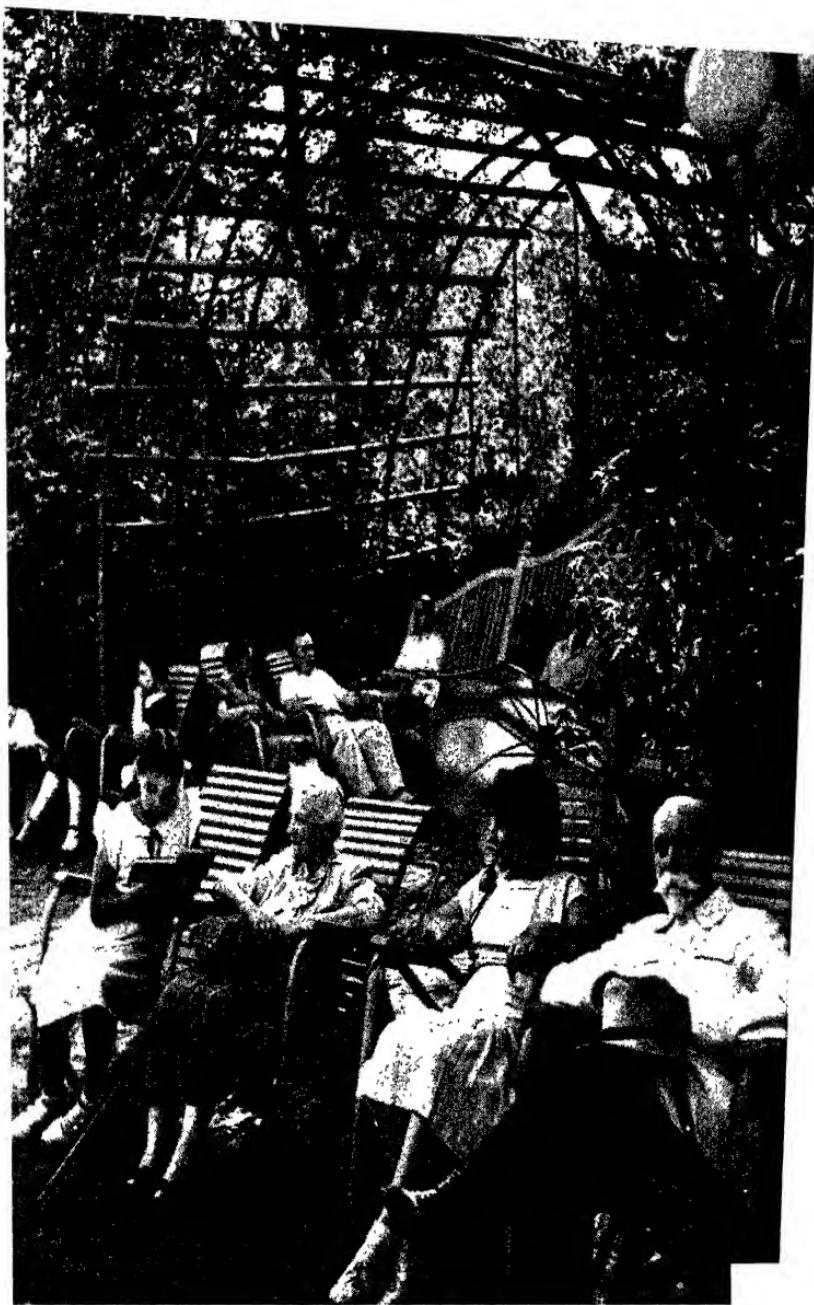
It was interesting to note with what care the Soviet authorities separated anything of Western origin from the native product. This was probably done with an educative purpose: the people noticed, for instance, that the Tretyakov Gallery

was far larger than the Museum of Western Art and, by an over-simplified process of reasoning, concluded from this that Russian art was superior to that of the West.

It was almost the same in Leningrad, for just by the Hermitage (the greater part of which was devoted to foreign—i.e., Western—art) stood a museum in which Russian art was traced back to its very origins. The Soviet public might be filled with wonder and admiration, but the Western visitor could not help noticing that comparatively few examples were shown for the years prior to the fifteenth century; a few represented the fourteenth, but for the thirteenth (when the great cathedrals of the West were being built), a lone exhibit held the field.

Our Embassy had on a number of occasions applied officially for permission to visit the Kremlin—itself a museum or, rather, a collection of museums—and we could not help wondering why a place through which in former times people were able to walk quite freely should now be so difficult of access; for now it was possible to walk only through the garden stretching between the outer wall and the Riding School. For the ordinary passer-by it was a holy place; when a car or a lorry loaded with goods entered or left the Kremlin, lights snapped on, police officials swarmed out from the most unexpected corners and bells began to ring, as if crying out “Back, peasants!” Everything else stood still as the car or lorry in question shot by, seeming to sweep away in its path this myth of equality. Evidently the protective halo of the Kremlin consisted of something more solid than a spiritual aura!

True, the heads of missions, together with their chief assistants, visited the Kremlin in order to present their credentials; furthermore, since they turned up by car, they had their full share of the bells, lights and the look of holy terror on the people’s faces. However, this was rather meagre satisfaction; during such a visit they were able to see little or nothing. When I myself went the car crossed the courtyard at a brisk pace and stopped before the Government building, where the



THE GORKY CENTRAL PARK OF REST  
AND CULTURE, MOSCOW



## FROM DAY TO DAY

protocol official was waiting for us. We climbed out of the cars, wormed our way through a narrow door and finally reached a small lift. Halt! Only the Ambassador was entitled to this means of transport! So, while he, accompanied by the official, ascended by mechanical means, the rest of us were obliged to take to the stairs. When we reassembled—the Ambassador calm and smiling, the rest of us wry-faced and blown—a Minindiel official in a light-grey uniform ushered us silently into the presence of the President. The Ambassador presented his credentials, made a little speech (immediately translated into Russian) to which the President replied briefly (his Russian being translated into French). There followed a handshake, our own presentation, and the conversation then became general. After ten minutes' small talk, during which everybody made an effort to be pleasant and cheerful, we took our leave. As I entered my car once more I could not help casting my mind back to a similar ceremony in Stockholm which I had attended a few years earlier; but there, carriages had been sent for us; a guard, dressed in the eighteenth-century uniform of Charles XII's day, lined the ceremonial staircase; and the King addressed us in French.

This first official trip had hardly permitted us to see the Kremlin, but eventually the Embassy was informed that we were to be granted the privilege of a real visit. At the appointed hour the group to which I was attached assembled near the entrance and was piloted through the gate by a police officer. Here our guide took charge of us and we set off in the direction of the magnificent terrace overlooking the Moskva (it featured in a painting I once saw of Stalin and Voroshilov walking together—a daub, incidentally). I turned to the famous balustrade in order to survey the beauty of the landscape and was somewhat taken aback to observe that since we had entered the Kremlin our party had been augmented and hemmed about by a number of policemen, which made it impossible to strike out on one's own. My enthusiasm was suddenly dampened.

We moved on to Cathedral Square and admired the beauty of the façades, the superbly decorated door panels, the bulbous pinnacles, golden and sparkling in the sunlight, and the crosses dominating all. These buildings seemed to be in a constant state of restoration and I never managed to view their interiors. On this occasion we were, in any case, being hurried along and forced to listen to some long rigmarole, first about some bell which had unexpectedly toppled down and cracked; then about the biggest cannon in the world, which had been designed to fire the biggest cannon-ball in the world, but—by the greatest misfortune in the world—had never actually been fired.

In close formation we swept through the ancient palaces. Here I would gladly have lingered, since in all Soviet Russia they alone were able to recall the tradition, the manners, the civilisation and the art of that bygone age which I desired to know more intimately. . . . But not a chance! Off we trotted in the direction of the Hall of St. George, the reception rooms and the meeting-place of the Supreme Soviet (which was not at all like our own Chamber and reminded me more of a Jesuit college).

At the entrance to the museum we enjoyed a moment's breather whilst removing our hats, coats and snow-boots. In public buildings throughout the Soviet Union one is continually obliged to strip off these quantities of clothing—a procedure so burdensome that a number of my Western acquaintances have given up visiting museums altogether to avoid both the delay caused by this undressing and also the indiscriminate jumble of the public cloak-rooms. Arrangements at the Kremlin, however, were very superior and this moment came as a pleasant break.

The museum collections were extremely rich and numerous; in fact, too much so, with the result that there was no time to study them properly, let alone to wander about. We remained together, a solid block; there was clearly to be no allowance for individual explorations and this was annoying, for I would have dearly loved to examine at leisure the weapons, costumes,

jewellery, thrones, furniture, carriages and harnesses which lay around me. Here was the history of a great people, yet the passing pilgrim could glean from it only a few straws, so intent was he upon following the guide—or so obsessed, perhaps, with the throbbing of an incipient blister!

Our visit lasted more than two hours and at the end of it I was exhausted. During this time the police had not left us for a single minute; they even accompanied us, rather haughtily, to the Kremlin exit. At this spot we, who had been unable to shake off certain decadent bourgeois habits, turned to thank our escort with a smile and a few words. We might have saved ourselves the trouble: they could not have cared less!

Back in the street I had to search around for my car which, for some mysterious and subtle reason (explained to me with great volubility by my chauffeur), had been shifted to another spot. I sank back on the cushioned seat and allowed myself to be carried back to the Embassy office and my press-cuttings. I told myself that I had seen nothing—observed nothing in detail; my visit resolved itself into a shifting kaleidoscope of cathedrals, large pieces of Sèvres and Saxony porcelain, a yatagan and a pair of boots which had belonged to Peter the Great. . . . My past experience and a growing scepticism told me that “they” would do no better next time.

Theatres, cinemas and museums—in this way I came into contact with a great number of people; but there were moments when I longed to escape altogether from a crowd in whose heart I was at one and the same time engulfed and isolated. Refuge could be found—if one was lucky—in the Moscow parks.

Gorky Park, which lay along the Moskva bank, was the chief one. It had been christened a “Park of Rest and Culture”; the “Culture” side, provided for by some fairground attractions and the unremitting blare of loudspeakers, tended to push “Rest” into the background. There were exhibitions, a theatre and a crèche, where children could be left in the care

of women attendants. At the far end of the park a garden, set under some big trees, held out some promise of relaxation.

However, Gorky Park entailed being thrust yet again into a large crowd and I came to discover that perhaps the only place in which one could truly escape was Sokolniki Park, a spot somewhat removed from the centre of the city. Here, in a wood, I found an atmosphere conducive to quiet meditation—a corner in which I might be myself and no longer merely a foreign element in the crowd.

Throughout my stay in Moscow I was continually harrassed by this need for solitude; this desire to escape from everybody, from the loudspeakers, the narrow regimentation, the insidious propaganda, the temptation to inertia—all the mechanics of a juggernaut calculated to crush one's personality. This solitude I craved, not for indulging in wistful dreams of the past, or of lands where life was simpler and more cheerful, but to savour a moment of peace—profound, personal, yet selfless—in which I might be once more united with the greater world of ideals—the ideals of life and liberty.

## CHAPTER VIII

### “We Georgians . . .”

**S**HORTLY after Easter, 1949, my eldest girl, who had been with me from the first days of my appointment, was spending a holiday in the Caucasus together with one of her younger sisters, then paying us a short visit. My wife and I decided to join them there and set off one fine May morning to take the train for the South.

It soon became clear that this was no ordinary train. The passengers also were something new: their manner was more volatile, their language strange and accompanied by much gesticulation, while beneath the big sheep-skin *papakhas*, typical of the South, appeared faces browner than any I had hitherto encountered; any Russians on the train seemed like fish out of water. There was a holiday atmosphere everywhere—quite inebriating to anyone whose existence had previously been spent travelling between Moscow and Leningrad, or sitting in the smoke-laden cellars and tawdry restaurants of the Soviet capital.

Since the journey was to take nearly three days, I was looking forward to it as an opportunity both to observe and relax. At first everybody seemed a little wary of his neighbours, but as we travelled on the tension eased and soon we were all on friendly terms. In a nearby compartment I had noticed two ladies, apparently mother and daughter, the younger wearing jewellery which included a magnificent bracelet. There was about them an air of distinction which alone would have been sufficient to attract attention, but when by chance I overheard them talking French, my astonishment and curiosity knew no bounds. I

contrived to enter into conversation with them (an easy matter in Russia) and learned that they had belonged to the Russian society of pre-Revolution days. Mother and daughter alike spoke excellent French, the mother having lived for several years in France. She spoke calmly, without bitterness, but with perhaps a trace of irony in her voice, telling me about her son, a field officer dedicated to the service of Russia (she seemed to avoid using the word "Soviet"). Her daughter gave a somewhat livelier impression and constantly bemoaned the fact that she had never been abroad. I became much alarmed on her account when at one point she burst out with "But never mind, those good times will return and we shall be free again, as in the old days!"

These ladies were travelling as far as Sukhumi. Once in the corridor of the train, where we took leave of one another, they spoke in Russian and our conversation was limited to the customary phrases current upon such occasions. They descended from the train and then calmly turned and disappeared amongst the crowd, without so much as a backward glance.

The train now moved on through a gentle landscape of woods and plains. On each side of the track were Soviet stars, marked out on the ground by means of pebbles, and also placards proclaiming the devotion of all railway workers to Stalin and the régime. In the carriage we were served with some abomination called tea and at every halt were assailed by country-women offering produce for sale. The time would have passed pleasantly enough had it not been for a wretched loudspeaker installed in the corridor of the train and which subjected us the whole day to an ear-splitting roar of propaganda. It was possible not to listen to it, perhaps, but to ignore it was quite another matter!

The following day, as if to tear us away from the contemplation of a lush countryside and to plunge us once more into the world of materialism, the train made its way across the Donbass, a region of belching fire and smoke, suggesting great

power and activity with its closely set rows of slag heaps and throbbing factories—a replica of similar areas in Belgium and the Ruhr, and certainly rivalling them in ugliness.

Happily we were not long in reaching the Sea of Asov and eventually the Black Sea. Between Tuapse and Sukhumi there were frequent delays in the train service, since the line ran along the side of a hill and then plunged into a steep cutting where landslides were a common occurrence. Had it not been for the constant vigil of engineers and the large gangs of women engaged in maintenance work the track would soon have collapsed into the sea below.

The train puffed on laboriously. Gradually the surrounding country began to assume all the characteristics of a Mediterranean landscape, with the white houses nestling among the trees, the sheltering mountains, the coves, the peaceful fishermen. . . . We were now in the land of the vine. I remembered the words of a Georgian encountered on the train; "Up North, those Russians drink tea and vodka. We Georgians prefer our coffee and wine!"

During my stay in the Soviet Union I found that, from the point of view of sentiment at least, naval matters always assumed a greater importance for me than military ones, and in my heart I was happiest when in some way brought into contact with the Navy. Well, here at least was the sea!

However, the Navy, too, was much in evidence on the Caucasian coast, for me its reality being suggested not so much by the water, the fishermen, the dredgers out in the bay, or the occasional passing submarine, as by an atmosphere of military preparedness which carried my mind back over the years. Sailors were everywhere, in the casemates, the fortifications, the shore battery command-posts, the earthworks below the railway line—living, working, watching, just as they had done in wartime. During that period it was the task of the Black Sea Fleet to defend the ports and coastal areas, but also, as befits a naval unit operating from enclosed waters, to link and co-ordinate its movements with those of the mainland forces. It

functioned as a mobile column, now probing tentatively the flank or rear of the opposing forces, now landing for the purpose of combined operations, and on occasion even bearing the full brunt of the enemy's onslaught.

When German and Rumanian troops invaded the Soviet Union their coastal advance remained unchecked, despite the shelling of Galatz, Sulina and Constanza by the Black Sea Fleet. To meet the crying need for territorial forces, naval regiments were formed and for seventy days these units managed to defend besieged Odessa. When the Germans swept on into the Crimea, Soviet sailors again went to the rescue, this time to withhold their great port Sebastopol from the enemy. Not until 3rd July, 1942, did they evacuate the city, after a heroic stand of two hundred and fifty days. During the whole of that year the Germans advanced relentlessly: they seized Kerch, Rostov, Krasnodar, Novorossiisk, occupied the Northern Caucasus, and then, drawing upon the Maikop oil wells, swept down the whole length of the Black Sea to occupy Tuapse and threaten Sukhumi. Here again, from the sea, the Fleet supported its retreating ground forces; then calmly fell back to Poti and Batum, regrouped and prepared for that great offensive which, in 1943, was to culminate in the victory at Stalingrad.

Already by 16th September the Navy had made a successful landing at Novorossiisk and, in conjunction with the Air Force, had elsewhere been responsible for the sinking of more than sixty transport vessels and a great number of landing craft. The Soviet Army now began to push the invaders back from the Baltic to the Black Sea and in April a combined operation resulted in the recapture of Odessa. The loss of Leningrad and the Ukraine had dealt the Germans two severe blows, but a third was soon to follow with the fall of Sebastopol and the ultimate liberation of all Crimea.

Once again the Navy had displayed its traditional dash and vigour. When, in his pronouncement of 22nd July, 1945, Stalin proclaimed it to be the faithful ally of the Red Army, his

description could have applied nowhere more aptly than to the role of the Black Sea Fleet.

At last, on a fine sunny morning, we arrived at Tbilisi (formerly Tiflis), capital of the Federal Republic of Georgia. This was the East, but an East tainted with a somewhat grubby Westernism, and from which, save in the case of the Kurds, the picturesque costume had disappeared. For me the city conjured up pictures of the Old Port at Marseilles or the station area of Tunis, rather than St. Sophia or the Acropolis. True, there was Beria Square (surely renamed by now), the main street with its new buildings, the local government offices and the bookshops with their Party literature; but such things were to be found in any other Soviet city. Tbilisi, however, possessed some charming features of its own which no amount of administration, whether Western or Soviet, could alter.

The river Kura, on which the town stood, had, in common with other mountain rivers, succeeded in impressing something of its own savage nature on the shores it washed, so that it was possible to view this torrent of water with its rocks and gorges even when standing in the middle of the city. Temporary relief and an opportunity for meditation could be found in the dim candlelight of the Armenian church, surrounded by the prostrations of the faithful, as also in the tiny mosque; but even here, beyond the surrounding walls, the continual sound of water could be heard. It seemed as if the gorges, the church and the mosque represented the three separate elements from which the ancestral traditions of Tbilisi had been compounded.

In the street I found a Georgian baker, working behind a tall, cylindrically-shaped oven of archaic design. From time to time he reached down into this cylinder and then straightened up, running with sweat, having produced a fine, steaming hot loaf of bread of the type peculiar to this region. No mass production here, no trusts or combines—this was the craftsman pure and simple!

To one side of the baker's shop lay a wine-cellar run by

Armenians, one of whom my wife and I had encountered whilst buying flowers. He invited us to join him in a mid-morning snack and we all sat down to a meal composed of a number of different dishes, wine and the wonderful white bread we had already observed being made. The cellar was cool and piled high with great barrels, two of which had been moved into place to support the planks from which we ate. The atmosphere was easy and calm, the conversation confined to trivial everyday matters; it was hard to realise that this was still Soviet Russia. I suspect that our hosts had some interest in the black market, for occasionally a client would appear, cautiously make his wants known, and then, with equal furtiveness, disappear, hiding what looked to me like a litre of wine from Government stock.

Beyond the cellar the road leading to the sulphur baths offered all the sights and sounds typical of the Eastern Mediterranean: pretty brown-skinned women, ragged children (the shoe-blacks of tomorrow), broken-down wretches beyond all hope of human salvage; the multi-coloured washing fluttering overhead, strung from window to window across the narrow thoroughfare; the air full of sounds, smells and contrasts, light and shade, woodsmoke, garlic, rotting grain, refuse and perhaps, suddenly, sweetly, astonishingly, the fragrant scent of rose or jasmine. . . .

I was anxious to push on beyond Tbilisi. My daughters informed me that the pilgrimage to Gori, Stalin's birthplace, was singularly lacking in interest, so we decided to travel along the river Kura to the old Georgian capital of Mtskheta where, in the convent of Saint Nina, perched on a cliff overlooking the city, Lermontov had written one of his most famous poems.

Mtskheta was famed for its lovely old Byzantine churches. Its peaceful inhabitants lived their lives under the influence of a pope with a long black beard; they appeared to have little in common with certain frenzied Comrades whose sole concern was the increased output of a hydro-electric power station which marred the natural beauty of the river at this point.

Intourist suggested that I might care to take a trip to Eastern Georgia, near the border of Azerbaijan, to visit the wine-growing *sovkhоз* of Tsinandali. I had long wished to see a collective farm at close quarters, and my pleasurable anticipation was increased by the mere mention of Tsinandali—a name associated with the finest Caucasian wines! Needless to say, I accepted at once. The Dutch Ambassador and his wife were staying in Tbilisi at the time and he and his wife heard of my proposed visit with such interest that finally it was arranged with Intourist that they should join us. My wife and I were delighted at this development, since the Ambassador was well-known as a man of considerable culture and enterprise who had made expeditions into the most unlikely regions of the world and, as a mountaineer, had scaled their remotest peaks. Tibet, Sinkiang, South Africa, the Himalayas, he knew them all; indeed, the outbreak of the 1914-18 war had found him already in the Caucasus and on the point of climbing Mount Kazbek. His wife knew both Paris and France intimately and was also a musician. This promised to be a wonderful journey.

As transport, Intourist offered us an old car and also placed at our disposal the services of an interpreter, since in this land, where Georgian is both the spoken and written language, a knowledge of Russian is not sufficient.

Eventually we left Tbilisi by a road honoured on our map by the description “improved,” but which for the greater part of the way turned out to be nothing more than a rough track. First we crossed a broad plain growing wheat and tobacco and on several occasions were obliged to ford streams; these, however, provided unexpected opportunities for replenishing our radiator. Now the track would be barely visible and we rumbled over a surface of loose stones; then it would plunge steeply into a rocky gorge where a capsized lorry could be seen lying at the foot of the jagged rock face and through which our own car swayed and skidded like a ship on the ocean. The going was certainly tricky but we survived two more rivers

and then, after a further sixty miles of bumping and jolting, finally reached the *sovkhox* of Tsinandali, situated in the former estates of the Princes Chavchavadze.

Here we were received with the traditional hospitality of the region, our hosts clearly having decided to make a special occasion of our visit. Without undue regard to etiquette we were assigned places at the big table and soon found ourselves sitting down to a sumptuous banquet where the major attractions were sucking-pig (a favourite delicacy in the U.S.S.R.) and the wines of the *sovkhox* itself.

Since, in Georgia, as in certain provinces of France, it was considered unfitting for women to sit down to table in company with the menfolk, our hostess stood behind us, unobtrusive, as silent as a shadow, either directing the serving staff or tending personally to our needs. She was dressed in the Georgian national costume with her face partially veiled after the manner of Anatolian or Greek country-women. From time to time she gave a smile, but, owing to the veil, it was impossible to be sure for whom it was intended. When the Dutch Ambassador proposed a toast in her honour (the very first of the many toasts to follow), she bowed deeply, placing her hand over her heart as she did so. I am sure that in our hearts we men echoed a sentiment which in former times would have been voiced aloud: "Woman was created for the solace of the warrior."

After this meal we strolled on to the terrace and then through the *sovkhox* itself. A faint murmur drifted up from the valley below and the air was charged with the heavy, damp fragrance of sundrenched earth. Above us Venus shone with a strange, almost tropical, brilliance, and through the cool, limpid transparency of this atmosphere I could clearly discern the ragged outlines of the Caucasian mountains.

We walked on slowly, chatting freely and without an interpreter; the Ambassador with the "President" of a neighbouring *sovkhox*, and myself in company with our host and an agricultural expert. What a pleasure it was to be able to

exchange ideas freely with men whose beliefs differed so greatly from my own! They professed the Marxist faith: I did not. They accepted the Marxist concept of fundamental materialism, whereas I subscribed to another article of faith, according to which matter itself proceeded from the spirit: *In principio erat Verbum*. However, these differences, once expressed, did not appear to affect our friendly relationship; but, beyond agreeing that our own two countries wished for peace, we did not venture too deeply into a discussion of politics and our talk was about life in general. I was happy enough to let my companions do most of the talking, since by listening to their spoken thoughts I hoped to draw nearer to my cherished goal—the revelation, in however small a measure, of this nation’s innermost soul.

During the course of our conversation together I put these questions to my companions: “Do you not feel that you have gained something by your contact with foreigners, even though they represent a society which in your view is damned? Are not personal relationships of any kind—the very fact of knowing and being known—the best insurance against the misunderstanding and prejudice which now beset the world? Would it not be better for the peace of the world if we could do away with this system of ‘curtains’ and watertight compartments and dispense with the endless exchange of diplomatic notes?”

They agreed, but at the same time observed, “That does not depend on us, any more than it does on you.”

The following day we were able to see a collective farm in action. The working day began at 6 a.m.; half an hour later followed a radio news broadcast; work continued with a short break for lunch and tea and then ended with supper. After supper there was a rest-period, followed by “cultural activities.”

The regime considered this question of cultural education to be of prime importance for both town and country workers and, in order to cope with the problem, had created thousands

of workers' clubs throughout the Soviet Union. To any Westerner misled by the word, it should be explained that a "club" was nothing more than a place of assembly or a study circle; it was usually housed in some dirty, dusty room, poorly furnished with old tables, rickety chairs, with benches piled up at the back and with perhaps an armchair for the chairman. On the walls hung colour-prints of Lenin, Stalin, local celebrities and the victorious Marshals of the Soviet Union. From time to time the caretaker in charge had a cleaning fit: he swept the place out, lined up the chairs and benches and gave the pictures a vigorous rub-over (which only smeared still further those dark patches resulting from the unrestrained sanitary habits of summer flies). To crown these labours he might place a jug of water on the main table after covering it with a fringed cloth, or, perhaps (more hopefully) a fresh white one. He then returned to his little world of sleep, smoke and idleness.

The library consisted in the main of old, badly-bound books with missing pages and corners yellow from the continuous imprint of greasy fingers. The more recent additions were very badly printed and covered a variety of subjects, such as Marxism, military history, algebra and technology. It was almost as if the ego of the untutored readers were flattered by the very availability of such books and they felt themselves in some way ennobled by the mere contemplation of such strange signs as roots, integrals and simple fractions. After all, this was *Science!*

The rural workers responded as well as they could to this business of cultural enlightenment and, since their activities were directed, at least did not have to bother their heads about the form such activities should take.\* They turned up after their day's labour, looking as if they would rather lie down and

\* In this connection I cannot help contrasting the dilemma of a young Society woman of my acquaintance who had been deported during the war, first to Germany and then to France, in which country she had finally married and taken up residence. This lady experienced the utmost difficulty in adjusting herself to the mentality and working methods of the French people, her continual complaint being "But they don't tell us what we should be doing!"

go to sleep (I was told that this is out of the question). Some professed quite sincerely a desire to improve themselves; some just followed the rest, hoping, perhaps, for a film-show, a few jokes, or at least some comic incident; some were quite happy to sit listening to a talk of any kind, choosing to regard this as a flattering indication of solicitude on the part of the régime. The majority, however, admitted that only the fear of social disapproval prevented their being absent.

Whatever good advice was given at these meetings, it was obviously insufficient to woo the worker away from the good things of life. The Georgian no more despised his wine than the Russian his vodka, the latter indeed asserting that this possessed considerable therapeutic properties. This indulgence tended to become so costly that the rural worker often took to manufacturing his own brand of liquor, called *samagon* —a veritable rot-gut which made short work of mouth and stomach. A law forbidding its manufacture remained largely ineffectual, thus sharing the fate of similar laws passed in other countries.

Our stay at Tsinandali ended with a visit to a museum devoted to the Georgian poet Chavchavadze, former owner of the very land and buildings occupied by the *sovkoz*. The touching enthusiasm with which it was presented by the agricultural expert, who acted as curator, made one overlook certain amateurish and clumsy features of presentation.

Whilst travelling back to Tbilisi, I realised that the rough road and the jolting of our car were disturbing me far less than on our outward journey; in fact, I was hardly aware of the car itself. The primitive road, the savage landscape and the very appearance of the people we encountered combined to form an unforgettable picture and to suggest a time far removed from our own: we saw horsemen armed with rifles and daggers, similar to those of Anatolia; big Caucasian oxen with broad, flat horns lumbering slowly on behind their masters; herdsmen dressed in sheepskin cloaks; veiled women in voluminous dresses, carrying their earthenware vessels and

bundles in the Eastern manner. The road was constantly blocked by flocks and herds, all making their way to the upland pastures. The animals turned upon the noisy, steaming conveyance bearing down on them a glance of utter disdain.

As these figures—the horsemen, shepherds and women, with their striking costume and proud bearing—moved slowly across the landscape, they seemed invested with a kind of antique dignity, which evoked an age when the East was still untouched by European influence. In such a setting it was the occasional passing lorry, our car and we ourselves which seemed the anachronism.

Back in Tbilisi I suddenly found that I could no longer endure the main street, the noise of bus and radio and the continual sight of Soviet leaders staring down from every placard; so with my wife I took the funicular railway to the hilltop overlooking the city. We passed the restaurant—a favourite rendezvous for the rich people of the district—and continued on until we had reached a wild and lonely place from which our eyes commanded a view of Tbilisi and the valley of the Kura; in such a world man and politics had no place. Long after we had made our way down the hill, through the terraced botanical gardens with their trees and ravines, the memory of this precious moment remained with me.

I was shortly to be dragged once more into the world of politics, although admittedly politics in Tbilisi had a peculiarly Georgian flavour, as distinct from the Ukrainian or Russian variety. The visiting foreigner, conspicuous by his Western clothes, was liable to be buttonholed at any moment of the day, whether in the street, a bus, restaurant or museum; then questioned, challenged and generally called upon to give an account of himself. Usually, he was further obliged to listen to what amounted to a confession of faith on the part of his new acquaintance. The pattern was always the same: if confronted by a Frenchman, the orator—he was no less—began his discourse by paying a few tributes to the land of France, only to



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expand more fully later his real theme—the glory of all things Georgian. He talked openly and freely, with no awkward witnesses to dampen his enthusiasm; now putting forward ideas, now fiercely defending them; describing in detail the conditions under which he at present lived and then conjuring up a picture of the world in which he hoped to live in the future. Intourist could hardly have bargained for confessions so spontaneous and public!

In common with other visitors I was surprised at the persistence of Georgian nationalism, displayed in incidents such as these, the maintenance of old local customs and the attitude of the men towards their womenfolk. It seemed, however, that the régime envisaged a community of nations within the framework of the Soviet Union and claimed to foster rather than to suppress nationalist sentiment; certainly the press of the Federal Republics was under common orders to set aside at regular intervals long columns devoted to news of the great family of Soviet peoples.

At Tbilisi University both instruction and examinations were conducted in Georgian, with the exception of the State Examination, for which Russian is obligatory. Great pride was displayed in all things relating to Georgian art and history, such as the Tbilisi and Chavchavadze Museums, the lovely old buildings at Mtskhét and the almost sumptuous edition of the works of the national writer Rustaveli. But alongside this stress on Georgian glories, past and present, I sensed also a latent hostility towards the Russians, of which the tea-vodka versus coffee-wine controversy was but a minor manifestation.

One morning, in the market place, I was engaged in conversation by an orange seller who, having assured himself that I was not a Communist, confided to me that he had been in Europe at the end of the war.

"When I returned to Georgia," he said, "I no longer felt free; the Russians seemed to be clamping down on us at every turn. Why, their regulations don't even permit me to sell

you oranges, as I am doing at the moment, and I expect I shall end up by being arrested. True, they've brought us some material benefits, but we've no longer a thing we can call our own. They'd even like us to dress Russian style; but they can keep their blouses—I prefer to dress as my forefathers dressed and to live the way they lived. After all, we're Georgians, not Russians."

On another occasion, when visiting the Tbilisi Museum, we stopped in front of a map of Svaneti, a mountainous region on the higher slopes of the Caucasus. A man standing there—probably a museum official—at once offered to give us some explanatory details. Proudly he conducted us to a glass case which contained the sword surrendered by Napoleon to Murat and then embarked on a description of Svaneti itself.

"This region has never known a feudal system and has maintained its independence against all comers," he asserted.

"And now?"

"Now? Why, they're still independent—they're free Georgians!"

But probably the most revealing remark was that made by two Georgian intellectuals with whom I talked on the train. They regretted the overwhelming Russian influence in Soviet politics.

"The worst of it is," they complained, "we are expected, as Soviet citizens, to be happy; and yet we still remain under Russian domination. We are unfortunate in our good fortune!"

The Soviet influence was to be felt everywhere: in the propaganda, the political bookshops, clubs, Party papers and organisation, and also in the police with their uniformed militiamen and plain-clothes informers. To give added force to the picture, an enormous statue of Stalin had been erected on the hill overlooking the city. This remained visible all night and was illuminated by a steady, red glow.

For Georgians Stalin represented not the iron hand of the Soviets but rather the local boy who made good. They saw

him as the Father of the People, benevolent, just and compassionate, and believed firmly that the injustices from which they suffered had been brought about without his knowledge: he may have been deceived by his entourage, but he remained for all that a Georgian!

It was with considerable regret that I left Tbilisi to return north. In the Caucasus I had rediscovered warmth and life—all the atmosphere and charm which I had come to associate with the Mediterranean. I had found again a land of coffee and wine.

## CHAPTER IX

### By Land and Air

EACH of my trips seemed to increase further my appetite for travelling. As a rule I went by train and returned by air—a system which ensured me both speed and the leisure to observe.

The Soviet train service was regular but very slow, a fair average speed being in the neighbourhood of twenty-five miles an hour; the Red Arrow (linking Moscow and Leningrad) winged its way at thirty-five miles an hour. Admittedly, the Soviet public were in no hurry; to them time did not mean money. But the cause of the slow train service did not lie in this.

Any Westerner travelling by rail in the Soviet Union would be struck by the amount of maintenance and ballasting work being carried out; everywhere specialist troops and women—especially women—could be seen carrying earth and rails from one place to another, reinforcing the crumbling embankments, knocking bolts out of one length of line, pushing bolts into another—all work made necessary by absence of stones and the soft, loose consistency of the surrounding soil.

The locomotives had an ancient look and reminded me of those plying in some of the suburbs back home. Modern locomotives existed, but these were mainly employed for pulling goods convoys, particularly in the industrial areas. Electrification was fairly general. The remainder of the rolling-stock was usually in a shocking state; many carriages (in addition to that “international” *wagon-lit!*) were of wooden construction and the railway trade-unions hailed it as a triumph when, in 1950, all-metal carriages were put into

goods depots, of archaic pattern and partially destroyed during the war, were, in common with the transport itself, only slowly being brought up to date; here again any new material was being diverted to the great industrial regions. Of the signalling system it is better not to speak, except perhaps to say that it was primitive and kept an enormous number of employees busy with their little flags, both in the stations and along the line.

What with the poor ballasting, the preponderence of old and worn-out equipment and the out-of-date signalling procedure, fast trains were perhaps, after all, too much to hope for. This lack of speed, due to technical causes, was largely counterbalanced by a wealth of other interesting features of purely human inspiration. Meals were generally catered for by the restaurant-car (where there was one), but even these occasions, with the *à la carte* service and the good-fellowship of the diners, seemed to take on a special character; so unlike the serious, austere and rather businesslike atmosphere surrounding their Western equivalents.

Apart from the facilities provided by the restaurant-car, the question of food was often solved in another and most happy manner: at every station (except in the large towns) the platforms were thronged with the inhabitants of local collective farms who offered a great variety of produce at prices which, for one who had lived in Moscow, seemed very low. This included boiled eggs (cold, in the Russian style), bread, butter, sunflower seeds, live geese and chickens (what on earth would one do with these?), cooked chickens, raw potatoes, fruit, cake and, of course, vodka. In their uniform dresses and gaily-coloured head-shawls these peasant women did not vary much in appearance, whether the scene was set in the Ukraine, or down the Volga. Some were pretty (as in the Ukraine) but, in general, they seemed expressionless—except, perhaps, when discussing the question of price. They floundered there in the mud, snow, or dust, individually featureless, yet in their assembled mass conveying an impression of buoyancy and life;

as if, despite their collective farm regulations, the propaganda and the uniformity, their souls longed for some spark which would help them to awake, unfold and enter into the fullness of life and love.

In the big stations the stops were long enough to permit passengers to dine in the buffet or restaurant, but I remember that at Kiev I had to bolt down a large meal in the space of ten minutes because the waiter kept everybody waiting before he even began taking orders. Inured as I was to this state of affairs, I could not help showing some signs of impatience; but I was the only one to do so.

Where no restaurant was at hand, other arrangements were made; I remember that in the shattered station at Kursk a big table and benches had been set up and I joined the other passengers as they fell upon the bowls of plain soup and the black bread laid out there. It was delicious!

The Red Arrow was distinguished by a special menu; a young woman would patrol the corridor serving smoked salmon, pork, biscuits, beer and vodka—all very handy for anyone wishing to breakfast before arriving at his destination. This lady would permit no half-measures: masterfully she would serve me with vodka and, if I so much as dared to suggest that fifty grammes was enough, would become quite indignant, raise her eyes to the ceiling with a look of profound pity, and then proceed to pour me out a hundred or even a hundred and fifty grammes. "Fifty grammes for a man! We can't have that. You and your fifty grammes—what sort of opinion do you want me to have of foreigners . . .?" That clinched the matter.

This little snack would be washed down with one or more cups of tea, obtained from the samovar which was continually on the go in the corridor. Tea was eagerly awaited. A journey could hardly be called a journey if there had been no tea and the travelling public kept a discreet but watchful and critical eye on the man in charge of the samovar. This good fellow was kept busy stoking away and at the larger stations

would dash out on to the platform to draw water from an enormous boiler kept hot for this purpose.

One morning, en route from Minsk, I asked for my tea.

“After Smolensk,” announced the Keeper of the Samovar.

When the train had pulled out of Smolensk, I tried again.

“Straight away,” was the answer.

He brought me a glass full of hot water.

“But that’s water not tea!”

“Of course. On this run tea has to be supplied by the passenger.”

No tea! And there was nothing I could say or do about it. It was the only instance I encountered of a breakdown in the tea-supply.

Throughout my journeys in the Soviet Union I found that in all matters connected with the economic, and basically most important, commodity of food there was, if not refinement, at least an abundance, readily available to the possessor of roubles.

The train limped along, its cargo of passengers divided amongst hard, soft or *wagon-lit* compartments—descriptive terms which replaced our “classes” and conveyed the full scale of available comfort. The journeys were often so long that everybody was equipped with a sleeping-berth—if the “hard” ones could be honoured with this name. Since these were left open throughout the entire trip, passengers were obliged either to stand in the corridor or to travel lying down. The latter course seemed the more popular.

Prior to the train’s departure there would be the usual stacking of luggage and the scurry and bustle of the good-humoured crowd; and, as the train moved off, the last-minute arrivals scrambling aboard, with the inevitable sailor, jacketless and with his cap pushed back on his head. As in France, people loved to drink whilst travelling; but here vodka replaced the red wine and produced its usual rousing effects. In winter nothing was more agreeable than a hundred grammes of vodka tossed down the throat after a meal of smoked fish.

Every section of the population was represented in this train community: officers, officials, workers and peasants. By their manner it was easy to distinguish those on business from the ones going on holiday. For the latter the great "dodge" was to obtain a *putiovka*, or travel-voucher, which authorised their journey to a sanatorium for purposes of recuperation. Apparently, this was ridiculously easy to obtain.

Other passengers—more or less stowaways and in Russian slang known as "hares"—would infiltrate into the trains or preferably ride it out on top of the carriages. At the beginning of the run one's heart would go out to them, but when, after a few hours, they had been covered with soot and cinders, one was more tempted to steer clear.

I frequently visited the Moscow railway stations in order to renew my store of human impressions and to gaze upon people who had come from places far distant. . . .

The Smolensk train drew to a halt and the passengers slowly emerged. Those carrying larger pieces of luggage were directed to scales to have them weighed and charged—a simple way of dealing with baggage registration. Upon alighting at the station, some of the country folk would stand stockstill, as if smitten with agoraphobia, before moving away to the taxi, Metro or bus, and finally disappearing into the heart of the city. As I watched them disperse I could not help reflecting upon their life, their fatalism and the degree of acceptance to which they had now come. They seemed carefree: they came, they went, they submitted, as prone to indolence as to heroism. Perhaps they found it enough just to be living.

Train journeys in the Soviet Union had a calm and restful effect; the wheels turned unhurriedly through an immense landscape, the monotony of which tended to soothe and lull . . . through the woods of Karelia, the Bielo-Russian plain, the forest of the heartland, or the Ukrainian steppe with its heat and burning sunset colours. . . . The immense and seemingly unbroken vista of rich, black, fertile earth stretched on—a

land to settle and delight in. Occasionally houses would loom up, perhaps of the solid wooden type which old Russia constructed so well, or the white Ukrainian ones, straw-thatched as in the days before Five Year Plans were thought of; great rivers, too; the Oka, Dnieper, Don, or perhaps, away there in the distance to the East, the Volga itself.

Vast! From Minsk to Smolensk, from Leningrad to Moscow; at Kursk, Voronezh, Kiev and Stalingrad, mile after mile the immense forest and steppe unfolded, ready to engulf the traveller. It was then that I realised what insoluble problems the occupation of such a terrain would set the would-be invader. Here distance counted as nothing: he might advance for miles but, far beyond, yet further miles awaited him; his lines of communication with the West would lengthen, relengthen, and he would advance until another crucial point in history was reached—another Poltava, 1709; Kremlin, 1812; Stalingrad, 1942. . . .

To save time, or in order to reach places untouched by the railway, it was often necessary to travel by plane. Although there was nothing to compare with the ultra-rapid services of the West, Aeroflot, the civil aviation organisation, ensured safe and speedy travel within the Union itself. These planes rarely ventured beyond the frontiers, except perhaps as far as Helsinki, Vienna and, of course, Prague, Warsaw, Budapest and the capitals of other satellite countries. A foreigner travelling by these routes was kept under strict surveillance in order to prevent any untoward contact on his part. Thus, when my plane touched down at Lwow (a super-prohibited area) on the way to Vienna, the first person to enter the compartment was an M.V.D. officer. He very politely took charge of me, asked whether I needed anything and invited me to dine at the airport restaurant. The place was filthy and there were no vacant seats, but the officer promptly had a good table cleared for me. The late occupants surrendered their places without a murmur to this influential person who was

so clearly under police protection, and departed, still chewing their slices of beef. I had informed our Ambassador in Vienna of my arrival but at the airport the only persons waiting for me were a pair of very courteous Soviet officers with two cars —one for me and one for my baggage (one suitcase!). They escorted me to their Sector boundary and there delivered me to the French authorities, whom they had previously alerted. I recounted my journey to the Ambassador and he then told me his own side of the story. The Soviet authorities had maintained that, since no regular air-service existed between Moscow and Vienna (there was a weekly one, as it happened), they were unable to ascertain the day and hour of my arrival, but that they would take care of matters as soon as the need arose. Such distrust seemed almost morbid!

The airports themselves varied widely, although they were in general well equipped. Those at Minsk and Leningrad were the fruit of post-war reconstruction, yet immediately following hostilities had presented a sorry sight. Stalingrad was a kind of open hangar; Rostov was continually scorched by the burning sand; Kutais, in the Caucasus, was bounded by mountains, and Kazan by the Volga. Moscow had three fields: two of them had a provincial air, but Vnukovo, the central one, was always very busy.

When I look back upon all the trips I made by plane. . . . Coming from Germany to Finland I had only to look at the ground beneath to know when Soviet territory had been reached. The clean, neat, well-arranged fields gave way quite suddenly to vast stretches of earth, almost devoid of houses—immense areas of forest and cultivated land which revealed the passage of agricultural machinery: the *sovkhoz*—that enormous unit in which man as an individual vanished without trace. This Soviet land with its limitless, unimpeded distances put me in mind of the shapeless bulk of certain zoo inmates—the hippopotamus or alligator, for example; they, too, lay seemingly asleep, yet with a movement of a foot, a snapping of jaws, could suddenly crush or devour an enemy.

## CHAPTER X

# Official Propaganda and Public Opinion

**I**T was hard to remain uninfluenced by the daily dose of official propaganda; like slander, it had a way of sticking, unless one was continually on guard.

Since a thoroughgoing adherence to Marx-Leninism was essential if one wished to succeed in the Soviet Union, the propaganda assumed a strong doctrinal flavour. Following the example of Lenin and Stalin, the authors stressed the importance not only of active Party members but also of the non-Party population. Dissertations upon Marx-Leninism reinforced the knowledge already acquired by the citizen in his school, university or club; government-inspired communiqués and pronouncements and speeches by eminent persons all aimed at enlightening the nation as to the broad lines of Soviet policy. Alone, this theoretical aspect would have been insufficient, but it was supported by another, more down to earth form of propaganda which made itself felt daily in every corner of the Union: this was the interpretation and exploitation of everyday happenings at home and abroad. The approach was not new, but it was here handled in a masterly fashion and, since it operated in a restricted field, with the maximum of effect.

One old and well-tried theme was national prestige. By an interpretation of statistical matter, much would be made of the enormous size of the Soviet Union, but since the eloquence of figures alone is necessarily limited, the propagandists would

borrow an old picturesque phrase and describe the land as one "on which the sun never sets"—an image far more acceptable to simple souls.

The historical past also might be invoked. Moscow's eight hundredth birthday, for example, was made the occasion for magnificent celebrations, and it would have availed me little to protest, "But eight hundred years is mere infancy! Now, Paris, Rome and Athens, for example. . . ." They made much of the development of Novgorod, Suzdal and Kiev; but at a time when these Muscovites were living in primitive conditions, Byzantium, Greece and the Mediterranean had already known splendid civilisations.

This theme of prestige included Soviet achievements. Amusingly enough, even the fifteenth birthday of the Metro was commemorated, while the installation of gas in Moscow buildings gave rise to some quite sonorous articles in the press. The very real inventive genius of the Russian people, past and present, was extolled to such a degree that one was left with the impression that every known invention, from the atomic theory to radio and aviation—let alone the steam-engine, machine-gun and jet propulsion—had its origin in the Slav countries. To drive this point home Stalin Prizes were awarded every year to those who had played their part in the advancement of Soviet science, art and culture. Apart from the very considerable prizes awarded to those whose services were of an outstanding nature, others, more modest, acknowledged the patient toil of the worker who had, for example, improved the output of his working equipment or invented some new mechanical device. Such recognition had the effect of reconciling and binding the worker to his job and machine and encouraging him to put out his best work, particularly since it was manifest to him that the awards were made on a vast and comprehensive scale. We have nothing like this, a fact which enabled *Izvestia* to wield a magnificent propaganda weapon when it declared dogmatically that bourgeois science operated against the common people.

In order to find the national heroes to humanise their scientific articles, statistics and anniversaries, the propagandists dug deep into the Russian past. There were references to Dmitri Donskoi, Minin and Pozharsky, Peter the First, Suvorov, and sometimes, discreetly, Brussilov. When the cause demanded it, they would ferret out some less well-known figures, such as Lazarev and Bellinghausen, who sailed the Antarctic at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Such a reference permitted them not only some words of praise for the sailors themselves but also, whilst on the subject, a general airing of the historic "rights" of the Soviet Union in the oceans of the South.

National pride could not be raised to such a pitch without some kind of rallying point; this was usually anti-Americanism. Against the United States a continuous campaign was waged; like all campaigns based upon a systematic prejudice, this tended to become exaggerated and over-passionate, with the result that truth and objectivity became incidental to the theme. The deduction thus forced upon the public was obvious: in the United States—which, of course, implied beyond the Soviet Union and the satellite countries—there lived only gangsters and ruthless "bosses" who exploited the masses and sought to overthrow the might of the Soviets; as if, I once remarked, the Benelux countries had banded themselves together in order to topple the Soviet Union!

From time to time propaganda rode another of its hobby-horses: anti-Westernism. The Soviet Union could no longer remain in abject servility to the West. The campaign was violent in all fields, scientific, artistic or literary. Where French literature was concerned there was recognition of the past and classic glories of Molière, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Maupassant, Rolland, Anatole France and Barbusse, but silence concerning contemporary writers, apart from those of Communist persuasion. It is of course true that Soviet literary figures are equally unknown to the average Frenchman, but there was likewise no recognition of France's post-war

recovery, her wonderful railways, highways and hydro-electric projects. Occasionally the press would fasten upon some name or date relevant to our major French authors and, in the course of a commemorative article, demonstrate without difficulty that the person concerned was a more or less conscious enemy of bourgeois and capitalist society.

I remember one occasion, however, upon which politics seemed to be absent: this was a concert in honour of Saint-Saëns, given at the Conservatory before an especially invited audience which included—and this was a rarity—the staff of the French Embassy. It was all very well done. The artists were superb and included a quite outstanding woman singer. During the interval, at a buffet reserved for distinguished guests, cordial toasts were proposed and throughout there was a completely relaxed atmosphere with, on a musical plane at least, absolute sympathy and understanding. I was quite dumbfounded; but such an occasion was never repeated during the whole of my stay in the country.

Yet I cannot forget what was said to me by an engineer for whom our country, equally with his own, stood for the future; and this despite the fact that France had rejected Communism.

“We believe in France. In the present troubled state of the world, peace, which is as vital to us as to you, will come only as a result of action on your part. France must do something—she must do something. . . .”

The press—that major instrument of propaganda—bore no resemblance to our own. Lenin had described it as a factor in the establishment of socialism; it had become the mouthpiece of the Communist Party. Not only the ordinary press, but even technical journals, were interlarded with statements of a doctrinal character. The public was given its daily mouth-rinse of statistics and percentages with a disregard for absolute values which made it next to impossible for anybody to arrive at an accurate opinion.

The Party and Government entered into this business of reporting news with something approaching real zest and enjoyment, directing and prompting with great vigour, so that the reading citizen would learn only as much as the authorities intended him to learn. True, there was no tittle-tattle, scandal or filth, but what remained was couched in the style of an official communiqué. Any diplomat scanning the Soviet newspapers for foreign news would be disappointed. Major international events were mentioned incompletely, tardily or not at all, with the result that the reader was left with a false impression or, at best, only one version or aspect of the matter under review—that of the Soviet Government.

The pronouncements of Soviet delegates to international conferences were reported in full, but no mention was made of the replies, unless simply to comment that these were ridiculous. By such means every report on foreign politics published by the Soviet press was made to implement some measure of propaganda at home.

How could one best describe the function of this enormous and widespread institution, the Soviet press? To broadcast news? But only scraps of news were published, and then for propaganda purposes! To provide a forum for public discussion? But one had only the right to approve! What, then, was this press? It was nothing more than an official bulletin—an imparter of doctrine, a notifier of the government's (and hence the Party's) will and intentions.

There were a great number of papers, illustrated magazines and reviews. *Pravda* represented the Party, *Izvestia* the Government and *Trud* the trade unions, while others were published on behalf of the Komsomols, the railways, the Army, the Navy and so on. In every Republic there appeared a Party-inspired paper in Russian and others in the local language. There were papers for the main cities, the minor cities, the *sovokhov*, the collective farms, the miners, the fishing industry and the professions. All of them contained the same screened information, the same marching orders; and all of them were fraught

with the same overpowering dullness and tedium. The Soviet Union might congratulate itself upon the expansion of its press, but could any normal person become too worked up over the increased output of what, after all, amounted to nothing more than an official communiqué?

Yet it was a newspaper which enabled me to hope for a moment that I might meet again the head of the Atlantic Wall mission. Upon reading that he was serving in Moscow and had just been decorated with the Order of the Red Banner, I communicated with the appropriate department and asked them to pass on a message. In this I referred to the cordial atmosphere of our earlier meeting and also to the promise he had drawn from me that I should visit him if ever I found myself in Moscow.

My move was plainly regarded with suspicion, for I was obliged to answer quite a number of questions. As several days passed without a reply, I tried again—none too hopefully, and more or less for the principle of the thing. Again, silence. After my third attempt I was informed that the officer in question was on tour. Further insistence on my part would certainly have prejudiced the fortunes of a man whose simplicity and sincerity I remembered with such pleasure and I therefore allowed matters to remain there.

The Army and Navy conducted their own propaganda. Forces' associations brought together both reservists and young people of pre-service age and thus maintained contact between the nation and its armed might. These associations provided a constant reserve of potential able-bodied seamen, signalmen, wireless operators, parachutists and air-pilots. A torpedo-boat which had come from the Arctic and was berthed in the river-port of the capital was used by these people to carry out a number of thoroughgoing exercises, short of actually getting up steam.

The other Soviet organisations also had their propaganda, their slogans and badges; in fact, the Union seemed to be alive with badges of every variety, ranging from the "Veteran of

the Revolution" to the "Always Prepared" of the younger generation.

Soviet citizens undoubtedly possessed personal opinions in matters of housing, food and clothing, as indeed they believed they possessed them with regard to wider contemporary problems; but in a country which did not recognise the right to answer back, where the only constructive criticism published had to be favourable to the regime and current policies, and where citizens went about haunted by a fear of getting out of step, it would be difficult to claim the existence of a "public opinion." For all that, the Soviet people loved to express themselves—to put their personality across verbally—and the authorities were faced with the problem of how best to muffle subjects so naturally garrulous, assertive and likeable. A necessary safety-valve was provided by readers' letters to the newspapers and in the humour of some satirical magazines, the most prominent of which was *Crocodile*.

*Crocodile* aimed at those public officials whose inaction hampered the initiative of the peasants, workers and intellectuals: the bureaucrat so caught up with the fiddling details of administration that he failed to perceive the spirit and intention behind the measures themselves. The Government—or, rather, certain Government administrators—were lampooned pitilessly, but the régime (and above all the Party) was never brought into question; so everybody was happy. The *Literary Gazette*, somewhat incongruously, took upon itself to denounce administrative negligence and to revile those contractors who had been responsible for the construction of buildings whose only lovely feature was the façade itself.

Letters to the editor, and sometimes the replies published, were both pointed and instructive. They covered a wide range: the public complained of the Administration, its delays, its lack of consideration and the dishonest practices of certain of its officers. Every day from the depths of Moscow and the provinces arose groans and lamentations which blended

strangely with the steady fanfare of official propaganda, according to which everything was on the upgrade. Soldiers and sailors also swelled the chorus of complaint against "Bureaucracy"—the running sore of the régime. One had only to open the papers to catch a glimpse of the various petty annoyances which beset daily life.

All this provided an excellent safety-valve and one which had the positive effect of diverting the attention of the reading public through self-criticism, itself a factor in their education.

"I was so wrong!" proclaimed the author, director or engineer. "I confess it publicly; the fault was mine. I promise never to do it again. Now, this is where I was in error. . . ."

Thus a safety-valve adopted also a role of enlightenment.

If the culprit appeared truly repentant and was able to give sufficient guarantees, he received absolution. I was put in mind of the heresy trials of former days; the dogma had changed but the methods were very similar. All this was, of course, regarded as self-criticism and not opposition, for the latter—as Stalin himself had made very plain—would have implied counter-revolution. This self-criticism probably served a number of purposes: it could have been the unconscious exploitation of the need inherent in every human being to confess—to unburden himself; it may have released some inhibition; it was possibly a form of masochism.

But self-criticism is not possible without a standard of truth; and who was the repository of truth? I put the question to a convinced Marxist during the course of a train conversation. It led us to a discussion of infallibility, as applied to a group of persons, or even to a single person.

"And so you maintain that, in the exposition of Communist dogma, Comrade Stalin is incapable of error?"

"That is so: he is infallible."

"Then, surely, you would admit that other people, similarly, may consider that the Pope in Rome also is infallible in matters of dogma?"

"No."

"But why?"

"No. I don't admit that."

Full stop!

Trends of opinion, however, were to be encountered and I heard many people openly complaining, if not directly against the régime, certainly against those whom they accused of sabotaging its efforts through their inability to apply wisely-conceived measures. In effect the Government itself was under fire, but, whether through caution or cunning, complaints were levelled solely at its officers and would then conclude with the wistful remark, "If Stalin knew!"

For example, 1948 saw the suppression of a certain artistic organisation. Some of its members found re-employment at a Moscow conservatory, but the remainder were rather uneasy for the future, since the only employment offered involved their living in the Great North or the Far East. What retort could they make to the Government...? "If Stalin knew!"

The head-waiter of a restaurant belonging to a large enterprise confided in me that he sold vodka on the side, in order, as he ingenuously put it, "to fulfil my norm." He then added, "Stalin doesn't know our difficulties." The Government as an impersonal body was heartily disliked; the person of the national leader was venerated with a ready confidence born of that instinctive need for affection which is reserved for a single man but not an entity.

Sometimes a quite different sentiment was displayed, as in the case of a drunken officer in Sverdlovsk Square whom I saw shortly after my arrival in Moscow. He was yelling "Why should we go on fighting for that Georgian?" But this outburst was soon stopped by the sudden arrival of plain-clothes policemen.

War seemed to be the major preoccupation. "Why should anyone seek to harm the Soviet people, whose only wish is for peace?" a middle-aged man exclaimed to me. "Why do the

forces of reaction continue to harass us? In 1905 we had a revolution, in 1914 a war, in 1917 another revolution which brought the Bolsheviks to power; then the N.E.P.,\* those big trials and, in 1941, another war—and here I am now with white hair! Why should all this have to be? People in the rest of Europe, like us, want to live and work for the sake of their children and a better world; why, then, should America and the West seek to crush and humiliate us? These people in the capitalist countries have their own troubles and difficulties: they are wretched, exploited and experience nothing but injustice, unemployment and slumps. Why don't they allow their workers to unite with ours?" His outburst was both affecting and sincere. He voiced the feelings of the man in the street.

I replied that, although I did not for a moment doubt the Soviet Union's profound desire for peace, in the eyes of the West appearances were at times against his country; furthermore, that he himself was hardly possessed of sufficient information to judge of the matter. He replied coldly, "You're trying to mislead me." Then, after a moment's thought he added, "If we didn't believe what our leaders tell us, what would be left?"

This conversation and the confession of faith it evoked impressed itself upon my mind. Was it a case of blind resignation, fanaticism, or the complete surrender of the personality—the banishment of self—in the face of necessity? In this man was reflected the face of a people who refused to discuss dogma.

All this does not imply that everybody in the Soviet Union accepted the fundamental Marxist principle, the article of faith according to which spirit proceeded from matter; nor that all were free from experiencing in more or less distinct form that metaphysical uncertainty which, even more than the spirit of

\* New Economic Policy. Introduced by Lenin after the civil war and considered to be a retrograde measure.

laughter, is peculiar to man's nature. Religion, that "survival of the past," seemed to have stubborn roots and a strong spiritual sense still impregnated the Russian soul. Often I would follow the Moskva along to the far end of the city until I reached the Novodevichy monastery, which in former times had also fulfilled the role of a fortress guarding the approaches to the capital. Within the shelter of its crenellated red-brick walls lay a complete city, with dwellings, a cemetery, a convent, a seminary and the church itself.

The convent's only feature of real interest was the iconostasis, or sanctuary-screen, of the side-chapel. Beyond the walls of the convent were some scattered tomb-stones and a little farther away a very typical cemetery, a corner of which was reserved for general officers.

I preferred the church, which was one of those which had not been destroyed or converted into garages or anti-religion museums. Beyond the entrance steps, in a badly heated interior, some men and women busied themselves rather aimlessly, waiting for the moment when a door would open to admit a deacon or long-haired priest. They stood, expectantly, although just what they were expecting in all probability they themselves little knew. Upon entering the church doorway they had sensed a different atmosphere. An odour of sanctity?—not even as much as that. In this place they had quite simply found moral and spiritual shelter. They had experienced no sudden fervour, no surge of feeling; simply a sense of well-being, hidden, comforting and far removed from the jarring world of propaganda.

Beyond stretched a nave of such simplicity that, had it not been for the sanctuary screen, the icons and the flickering of innumerable candles, the place could have been taken for a barn. In the corner, behind a table, sat an old man in a khaki greatcoat, selling candles. When, by the cut of his clothes, he recognised a foreigner approaching, he would offer him some rather cheap-looking icons.

I stood for a moment in this peaceful place, where people

came to pray and where the soul could find refuge; then, followed by my shadow, which twisted and writhed beneath the trembling light of the tapers, I moved down the dim, still empty nave, into a world of silence, peace and meditation.

In twos and threes, almost furtively, the faithful began to arrive. The silence was now occasionally broken by a whispering, a sneeze, a fit of coughing, or perhaps the dropping of some object, followed by an alarmed but quickly stifled cry from the old icon-seller. The newcomers moved to and fro, lit their candles, prostrated and crossed themselves repeatedly, gazed upon the images and finally joined the rest of the congregation at the far end of the nave. Amongst them were young mothers who were vigorously rocking into silence babies of a few months whom they had brought for baptism. These women were accompanied by the fathers and god-parents, also young; in fact it was the youth of the congregation which impressed me. It seemed that, in spite of what was being taught, religion had not become the province of old people alone. As we waited there we were passed on a number of occasions by a youthful, dark-haired priest with keen eyes. He was important, severe-looking, and the people were clearly impressed, although it would have been more to their advantage to consider his function as largely pointless. When he finally took up his position, warm water was poured into the various fonts. The faithful grouped themselves around these and the ceremony began.\*

The mothers undressed the babies and delivered them to the priest, who immersed their naked little bodies three times in the baptismal water—a procedure which had the effect of cutting off their air supply and bringing about three moments of silence in their otherwise continuous howling. Now came the turn of the little boys and girls. Since the tank was not large enough to contain them, they were obliged to sit down

\* It should be borne in mind that in Orthodox churches there is no seating accommodation.

in it and have water poured over their heads; after which, quite unconcernedly, they proceeded to dress themselves.

In the meantime the assembled mothers, affected, thoughtful, perhaps even a little fearful, proceeded to wrap up these new Christians. They continued to bawl, however, even when comforters were thrust into their mouths. The nave took on the appearance of some noisy day-nursery; truly, little children, in all their innocence of mind and body, had this day been received into the House of the Lord!

When silence was restored the priest proceeded to the confirmation of the newly-baptised and each mother retired to present her Olga, Nicholas or Serge before the consecrated icons. Finally, the throng moved to where the doors of the choir were opening to release the unforgettable strains of the Eastern liturgy—an upsurge of voices which lifted the soul far beyond the confines of mortality.

At the other end of the city lay the Church of the Old Believers (a sect which had retained the old ritual). In style it resembled any other Orthodox church, but its condition was far more dilapidated and even in the bitterest weather the heating system was unpredictable. The officiating priests and their congregation alike were old—but old with an air of decay which somehow ill accorded with the new world about them. Here all was tatters, ruins and decrepitude.

Suddenly these faded old men began to sing, but not the usual choral patterns and classical harmonies of the Orthodox service (almost as acceptable in Berlin as in Novgorod); here, in a temple which still bore traces of the East, the melody was marked by the plaintive sing-song qualities characteristic of a Palestine now far removed from the singers' consciousness and memory. It was the chanting of Arabs in Morocco, Egypt, Bagdad; the rhythmic wailing of a soul in travail, turning for succour to its Maker. The semi-tones and modulations seemed to proceed from a kind of ecstasy. Yet in their method of chanting the Old Believers had adopted something

akin to the plain-chant of our old monasteries; I know of nothing more striking or poignant than an Oriental theme adapted to a Gregorian style of singing.

Poor Old Believers—despised, oppressed and moribund! For them there would be no crowds such as entered the cathedrals of Sokolniki or Zagorsk; no babies for baptism, as at Novodevichy! The windows were caving in, the congregation were shivering with cold; the old deacon was quite bowed down and would never again walk upright—the priest—probably with no successor—could feel only ruin and desolation pressing in daily from every side.

Yet, was not this one of the few blessed patches of earth remaining in the Soviet Union where politics had no place—one of the last sanctuaries in which spiritual values could find refuge? In my eyes the Church of the Old Believers appeared to shine with the last-minute radiance of a dying fire.

## CHAPTER XI

### Leningrad Revisited

I WAS to revisit Leningrad many times and never tired of strolling around the northern city. Yet the average street here was in no better a state of repair than in Moscow; roads and pavements alike were pitted and broken, the houses looked much the same and the queues in front of the shops were as long. Certainly the traffic seemed less congested, but the regulations remained as strict. The difference lay in the people themselves: Moscow contained a great mixture of foreigners, which included Tartar, Asiatic and other citizens from out-lying Soviet Republics; but the population of Leningrad seemed a more compact unit. One was tempted to consider the average inhabitant here as being more likeable than his Moscow counterpart; could the distance that separated him from the Kremlin have had anything to do with it?

Although the city itself appealed to me in every way, it was to the Neva itself that I was irresistibly drawn, for this implied the Navy. I remembered how in Moscow a Soviet sailor confessed that he also was in the habit of making pilgrimages to the Neva, in order to feast his eyes on the water, and that on these occasions he never failed to include a visit to the Navy Museum in order to renew his contact with the sea. He strongly advised me to follow his example.

Leaving the Winter Palace, I crossed the river and from Vassilevsky Island could see, looming up quite close to me, the Peter and Paul Fortress in which the museum was situated. I passed through a narrow door and descended into a rather

poorly lit basement containing the ticket-counter and cloak-room. In this same underground room were also some engravings (difficult to appreciate properly, owing to the bad lighting) and a collection of armour.

On the first floor some very fine rooms were dedicated to the old Russian Navy: the timber-built fleet of Peter the Great (now called Peter I); old vessels and items of tackle, the terms for which had been somewhat awkwardly adapted to the Russian tongue from the original Dutch. Nearby appeared the famous names of the Imperial Navy, as they featured through the course of Russian Maritime history from the Battle of Hangö up to the 1914-18 war.

Neighbouring rooms were devoted to the October Revolution, which had originated in Petrograd itself. Here were the now classical pictures of Lenin, the sailors of the *Aurora*, and of actions fought against the Yudenitch Army. I found it hard to remain unmoved in the face of the drama contained in these exhibits, for they brought back memories of past years —of events to which I myself had been a contemporary and, in part, a witness. Here were more phantoms to join those which I had already sensed about me in Leningrad!

Now the war of 1941, in which the Navy had come into its own. I lingered over the scale models of the Leningrad and Sebastopol sieges and photographs of submarines in the Arctic. The Soviet Navy had taken upon itself the role of the Imperial Navy, had added to it that of a Revolutionary Navy and now, after the 1941-45 war, was again reborn. Her ambitions now extended beyond the enclosed waters of the Baltic and Black Seas; they were, in fact, prepared to embrace the wider oceans which fringed the shores of the Union.

I remembered how the previous evening, on the train from Moscow, some admirals (a few of whom wore the gold star of the Hero of the Soviet Union) had sat talking in some neighbouring seats. I had no idea what they were saying, but they seemed a living symbol of that new Navy which the régime was seeking to develop; their assurance and very bodily

presence seemed to suggest the strength of the Navy itself—the third Navy of Slavonic might!

I allowed my eye to travel down the eternally flowing Neva to the Admiralty spire and the naval school—cradle of the fleet since 1701. The flag of the Soviet Navy had retained the white background of the Imperial flag; on the lower part there appeared also a band of that same blue which had once featured in the cross of Saint Andrew.

One summer evening I was strolling by a large, disused church which stood near the Moika. The windows were broken and holes gaped in the cupolas, but I was much moved to discover that on the walls, scrawled in chalk, were prayers for spiritual favours and heavenly protection. To my mind these crude inscriptions, in all their naïve simplicity, were far more significant than any offering of a more magnificent nature, made with an eye to outward effect.

On another occasion I was seeking a technical work in a bookshop on the Nevsky Prospect. The usual crowds stood before the various counters and I drifted from one to the other, hoping that, with luck, I might locate the work under one of the various and rather general headings: Teaching, Agriculture, Electricity, Transport, Military, Industrial, Combustion, etc. A compassionate saleswoman reached down under the counter, produced the required volume and then, having discovered wherein my interest lay, proceeded quietly and unsmilingly to erect a tottering pile of books bearing titles which she considered might be relevant.

As I was poring valiantly over these works a number of the other customers suddenly moved and then swept by me, leaving an open space in their wake. I turned and discovered that the origin of this disturbance lay in the action of a somewhat unconventional sprinkler system. An old lady, bent nearly double, was walking slowly backwards through the shop holding a battered water-jug in her hand. She had filled her mouth with liquid from the jug and was now squirting this out to left and right in a very fine jet and describing an

the shop floor a series of wet patterns which put me in mind of those nonchalant "figure eights" sprinkled on the platforms by the Metro employees back home in Paris. As soon as this old lady's mouth—I nearly said tank—was empty, she replenished it and continued her methodical application. When satisfied, she took hold of a broom and—hey presto!—the sprinkler became a sweeper! Nobody seemed surprised by this procedure, and so I assume it to be a normal one.

It was in this shop that I managed to ferret out a book on Soviet naval regulations. Rather as I had expected, there were long sections covering organisational matters common to all navies. I discovered also some details of a specifically Soviet nature, but, basically, these amounted to nothing more than a re-introduction or extension of measures which were already in force in the old Imperial Russian Navy.

Hair cuts: sailors had their head completely shorn during their first two years' service—perhaps not such a long period when one considered that the statutory length of service in the Navy was five years. In the Soviet Union shorn heads were not considered a disgrace; in fact they could often be observed not merely shorn but carefully shaved, rather in the German manner.

The conception of cleanliness on board ship seemed something quite peculiar, for a distinction was drawn between complete and utter cleanliness and what might be termed the day-to-day routine type. If the orders were anything to go by, the first, which applied only to public holidays, general inspections and other solemn and special occasions, must have involved complete dislocation on board for the space of several days; "routine" cleanliness, however, could have occupied a few moments only. In other words, one took a bath in an emergency but for the rest of the time a catlick sufficed! On Sunday there was an inspection; one just polished a little harder, then went ashore.

His superior authorities took great pains to direct the sailor's leisure hours, whether these were passed afloat or ashore.

A special room, or "Lenin Centre" was set up on board, which combined the functions of a study, an institute and a recreation-hall. As in the people's "clubs" ashore, here could be found standard political works, other reading matter and chess-sets. On the walls hung colour-prints and portraits of the national leaders. *Esprit de corps* also was not neglected, for it was here that naval achievements in general and those of the ship in particular were celebrated.

This was the spiritual heart of the ship: here was manifest the ideology of the régime as applied to an establishment afloat. It represented a real need to these sailors who, short of having recourse to anarchy—that sorry refuge of the strong-minded—felt an inner compulsion to share in an act of faith concerning an idea beyond themselves, however irksome this might be. Long ago, at Bizerta, I had occasion to visit units of the Wrangel fleet which had been evacuated from Russia after the revolutionary forces had taken Sebastopol; there, aboard a battleship, I found a chapel—a symbol of the Orthodox faith. Was not the "Lenin Centre" merely an extension of this feature?

Ashore, further "centres," institutes and sports facilities were all ready to welcome the sailor. He could hardly escape these provisions.

Whilst walking down the Nevsky Prospect, I passed some of these petty officers and sailors. Shorn-headed or not, they all seemed to walk the same way, their caps worn well to the back of the head with two ribbons dangling down to the jacket. A patrol marched slowly into sight, commanded by an impressive and severe-looking officer, whereupon some of the off-duty sailors made themselves scarce—a manœuvre common to all navies. Cadets of the Frunze School, complete with cutlasses, moved forward eagerly to meet their smiling lady-friends. Some young naval wards were strolling about, walking in step. The surroundings hardly suggested Brest or Toulon and yet, as far as the Navy was concerned, there were resemblances.

In a narrow street, near the Prospect, I saw a naval lorry bouncing over the rutted highway, carrying a fatigue-party of about a dozen men dressed in grey and unbelievably scruffy in appearance. Some of them lay stretched out at the back of the lorry; some hung on to the sides of the vehicle; others chose to stand, maintaining their balance with difficulty. There was no sign of spit and polish here: it was as if a herd of cattle were being moved on to new pastures!

When I encountered these Soviet sailors I could not help thinking of their superiors—the product of post-revolutionary cadres—who were seeking to further the traditions of the Imperial Russian Navy. I was continually put in mind of Admiral Makarov's dictum: "Remember the war!" Battle-preparedness seemed to be their sole preoccupation. To be able and ready to strike—this was also the aim of their predecessors who, after the reverse of the Russo-Japanese war, and inspired by Makarov, built up the Russian Navy between the years 1906 and 1916. I perceived here a unity of conception and, despite the setback of 1917, a continuity of endeavour—that sense of "following on"—which I had already observed in the Navy Museum.

I longed to see these Leningrad sailors aboard their ships, but was not permitted to do so. I therefore had to content myself with a trip on the Neva river-bus which passed by the cruisers, torpedo-boats and mine-sweepers, nearly all of which were undergoing repairs. Lighters were drawn alongside them; there were fatigue-parties, hulls covered with red lead, dismantled turrets—all the familiar working details were laid bare. It was a depressing sight and the rain only served to heighten the melancholy of the scene. I returned to the hotel, deciding that on the morrow I would explore the neighbouring sea-coast.

Intourist had suggested a visit to Zelenogorsk, on the northern shore of the Gulf of Finland, as a change from the usual tour of Pushkin and Petrodvorits. I set off by car, together with the compulsory guide, a very pleasant woman

who spoke admirable French. En route we discussed schools of religious painting and also my beloved Byzantine mosaics. We had soon left the outskirts of Leningrad behind us and reached the coast. I considered the landscape. There was nothing startling about it: we were close to the Neva, but as far as our surroundings were concerned, might equally well have been standing at Memel, or at Hela, in the Gulf of Danzig.

Birches and pines grew down the edge of the beach, which was long, straight, sandy, featureless and quite unaffected by the enlivening and transforming influence of any tide. Its colour alternated between yellow and grey; here and there lay pebbles, although how these had appeared remained a mystery. Tiny waves unfurled upon the shore; they issued from a grey sea which itself stretched away to melt in the distance into the grey of the sky above. These were the Baltic dunes—a type of coastline which began in Germany and reached across Poland and Prussia to a point beyond the mouths of the Neva, where we now found ourselves. Tilting gently down to the sea, it seemed to reflect the very nature of this great plain—a surface as shifting and uncertain as the peoples it nurtured, and seemingly as infinite as this grey of the sand, the sea and the sky.

We had stopped at the foot of a small dune. In spite of the overcast, the visibility was fairly good. Before us, at no great distance, rose up the fortress of Kronstadt; some dredgers were at work, moving slowly across the water's face; to the West I could see two destroyers darting about at a good speed. These moving craft presented a marked contrast to the becalmed vessels I had observed the previous day under repair on the Neva.

These two aspects of the Navy seemed associated in my eyes. Did I in some way connect yesterday's rain on the Neva with the greyness of the sea today—with this uniformity to which the sand dunes consigned the locality? The Leningrad-Kronstadt axis seemed a focal point: a Russian or Soviet

magnet, commanding the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic and drawing everything unto itself.

Confronted by these various images—the Leningrad streets, repair work on the Neva, the dredgers, Kronstadt—I suddenly understood why Soviet naval strategy in the Baltic had adopted such a defensive role at the commencement of hostilities. In 1914 it had been imperative to establish and defend the “central position” of the Gulf of Finland in order to remain close enough to protect this Kronstadt-Petersburg group; and, even now, had not the naval command created the axis Tallinn-Porkalla in order to ensure the same strategic provisions as in former times? This new disposition, also, had the effect of protecting the same group Kronstadt-Leningrad which now, thanks to memories of the Revolution and the late war, had come to assume an aura of enchantment and destiny. I felt that here standards of defence would be dictated by some natural law or fate itself: reasoning, however well presented, would not enter the matter.

Thus I deliberated upon the return journey while, out on the water, white yachts, manned by Soviet officers, tacked to and fro with ease and grace.

One day, in the course of my wandering pilgrimage across Leningrad, I discovered a Costume Museum. Naïvely I confided my delight to the Intourist representative. He informed me, somewhat severely, that the presence of a guide would have rendered a “discovery” unnecessary, since he would have directed me infallibly to the building concerned. True—but in the process I would have been robbed of the joy of just strolling!

The official name of this museum I shall probably never learn. Here, in well-lighted rooms, the sumptuous national costumes were displayed in all their glory; I moved amongst the peasants of Greater Russia, including the Ukraine and Moldavia—a truly wonderful voyage into the Russias of the past which acted as a balm and inspiration to my imaginative



ONE OF RUSSIA'S BOMBED CHURCHES



powers. Here also were Bukhara carpets from Central Asia—individual craftsmanship which had survived the onslaught of dialectic materialism and historic determinism.

I emerged, my head echoing with songs and folk-dances.

In another part of the city I visited a museum or exhibition which featured the Great North, not in terms of the sea-route across Northern Siberia, but of the population itself. Here the costumes were red and black—less brilliant than those I had formerly seen, but ensuring greater comfort and protection against the cold. Carvings on reindeer bone and wood bore witness to a deep artistic taste which, undeterred by the climate and the polar nights, clamoured for expression and whose manifestation was limited only by the medium available. A brightly coloured picture had sprung from the brush of a native who knew nothing of the Impressionist School; in it one sensed the urge towards that light, clarity and inner joy which his Northern home alone had been unable to satisfy. This was talent, true and primitive; even the clumsy passages were redeemed by humanity and sincerity.

Upon my return to Moscow I spoke of this canvas to an official painter at the Kremlin who had received the Stalin Prize and numerous decorations. Rather as I had expected, he knew nothing of it.

At other times I would leave the Neva behind me and make my way to the crowded areas of the city near the Smolny Institute and the commercial port.

The Smolny quarter lay beyond the Moscow Station and along an unexpected continuation of the Nevsky Prospect. Its shops, stalls and flaking house-fronts contrasted sharply with the Admiralty end of the Prospect. Around the latter the shops were as numerous and, although the building surfaces were as badly cracked, the place spoke of past opulence—it formed but the ante-chamber to squalor of the grubbier variety. In the broken-down streets and alley-ways of the

Smolny quarter passers-by were as poorly dressed as in the city's centre but seemed somehow more wretched. I wandered through anonymous back streets and found myself once more by the Neva. The Smolny dome attracted me in some way, but I was at a loss to decide what reactions were produced in me by the sight of the building and its surrounding gardens. Should I reflect upon the daughters of the nobility who had in former days been educated here, or upon the irony of fate which transformed it into a Revolution Headquarters? There it stood, seemingly indifferent—almost an anomaly—confronting the neglected and badly-paved streets, the miserable dwellings and their inhabitants, the shopping queues, the cheeky urchins, the noisome beggars. . . .

Again the old nagging question arose: what was the point of all this upset—the ideological hotch-potch, the so-called social reforms, the medical services, entertainments, paid holidays, the prosy directives? The condition of the people seemed no less wretched: they suffered as they had always suffered, except that now they struggled on without even the hope of ultimate bliss eternal; they were subject to a new form of exploitation, for at the door of this brave new world of materialism they had been obliged to abandon both hope and charity. The solution? There existed no single solution to the "problem" of man; only attempted explanations of all the various problems which concerned him.

I now found myself crossing a bridge which supported a highway, trams and pavements. Ahead I could see factories and shipyards. The men who worked in these were slaves to machines which had been created by other men—to machines and to the material world which they had once perceived as an end in itself, but which now held them in bondage. How often had I heard this idea voiced in the West! It was one of those easily exploited themes which, basically, amounted to nothing more than a "digest" of ideas. But here, the "theme" had assumed concrete shape and I perceived it for the first time not as a commonplace but as an agonising

problem touching the fate of the entire world. The pundits who spoke so learnedly of the matter would not have been so cynical and blasé had they experienced (as I was now experiencing) the sheer weight of misery reflected in the people—in all the unfortunates of the world—who now surrounded me. I felt overpowered by the sense of this burden and found that my very shoulders had drooped physically beneath it.

From this time on I felt strangely led to frequent these abodes of despair, where the sight of factories, workyards, the damp and dingy basements and other forlorn human habitations obscured the Trades Union House, the Palace of the Soviets and other similar buildings—those so-called seats of culture, constructed by the régime for the benefit of the régime.

Heading for the port I passed through a number of little alleyways with slippery cobblestones to emerge at the Marty shipyards which bordered the Fontanka: Gas Street; more houses; patches of waste land; factories. Despite the damage due to the war the Kirov works were going full blast. What they were making there I neither knew nor cared; I saw only the neglected ruin of the surrounding houses. The naval construction yards began at this point and continued down the Neva banks to the estuary in the Gulf of Finland; and still, all around, were these houses with worm-eaten doors, badly paved alleys, pools of water—this atmosphere of decay itself, perhaps symbolised in the hulk of a torpedo-boat or some other craft lying in the lee of a partially demolished bridge, or at one end of some crumbling little canal backwater.

It all seemed too melancholy for words. Where should I turn to escape and forget? In the Caucasian cellar on the Nevsky Prospect I could more than drown these memories; at an operetta, in the Kirov Park or on the islands, I could lose myself amongst the carefree (or resigned) multitude; across the Neva I could feast my eyes upon the grandeur of palaces. . . . I walked in the direction of the Summer Garden and stopped to gaze at the gaudy, bulbous pinnacles of a large church, much damaged by the war. The figure of the Virgin Mary gazed at

me from beneath its little porch roof. She was still alone, Our Lady of Sorrows; nobody passed this way and now, in this world of materialism, who was left to tend her? The dark canal-water glimmered beneath the trembling bridge. In the Virgin's face was reflected all the gentleness I had found in the mosaics. Suddenly I felt far removed from the factories, the shoddy roads and the wretchedness of poverty. A woman, still young, passed slowly by me to where the image stood, kissed the face, drew back and then, with deep reverence, crossed herself three times.

I returned to my lodgings. I no longer needed to continue my wanderings. My spirits, lately downcast, had now risen to fill my whole being. I walked beneath a splendid summer sky; politics, intrigue, the Five-Year Plan, mankind itself, were far removed from my consciousness, so entranced was I by this sweet and tender moment—a moment whose flight I was powerless to control, yet which, in desperation, I longed to bind unto myself.

The Summer Garden seemed well-kept and inviting. I passed through the restful silence and calm of its trees and avenues and, emerging at the far end, found that a crowd of people had gathered at the St. Isaac Cathedral. The building, reputed to be one of the highest in the world (its sole merit—despite the fact that the architect was a Frenchman!) had been transformed into a museum. A group of us jostled our way to the top of the dome. The view was magnificent: before our eyes lay outstretched the waters, canals and monuments of the city, from the nearby Admiralty to as far as the Smolny Institute. In the distance it was possible to discern the Gulf of Finland and, when the weather was clear, Kronstadt itself.

At this altitude the wind blew strongly; the wind—that pure and unadulterated element, beyond the reach and defiling of governments and police; the wind, free with a freedom that could intoxicate those who chose to fill their lungs from its vast store.

## CHAPTER XII

### Holy Russia

FOR the majority of Soviet citizens Easter was still Easter, the most solemn feast of the year; but, unlike May Day or the anniversary of the Revolution, it was marked by no sudden outburst of popular demonstrations, with people in the streets, firework-displays and the official participation of the authorities. It possessed—probably for atheists and non-practising Christians alike—attributes of a more private and intimate nature which non-recognition by the Communist Party was powerless to affect. A foreigner (even one who did not himself attend the services held at this time) could hardly avoid realising that something unusual was going on in the city, if only when his cook announced that the price of eggs had rocketed at the collective farm market, or that they were unobtainable owing to the great demand occasioned by the special Easter meals.

Since the Orthodox Church has retained the Julian Calendar, Easter Day rarely coincided with our own, but fell usually in April, during Moscow's Spring thaw. It was celebrated by people still muffled in winter clothing who, since they were not on this occasion obliged to manifest official joy in favour of the all-protecting régime, were usually anxious to return home as soon as the service was over.

During Lent the bells seemed to ring more frequently than usual. Unlike our Western chimes, which reverberate and spread in great, deep waves over the countryside and into the very souls of men, these Eastern bells seemed hurried, echoless; they chinked out their one, brief, unvaried note with an

air of hopelessness and ended in a flurry. This quick, almost breathless, tolling evoked the beating of an anguished heart as it laboured beneath the cares and afflictions of a relentlessly fleeting life.

On the day before Easter an unusual spectacle could be observed in the streets as women, both young and old, snatched a moment's leisure and made their way to the church for the blessing and purification of their *pasbka* and *kulich*. These Easter cakes were carried on a plate or board and enveloped in a white cloth so that even the most gloomy-looking streets were lightened by a long series of white patches. This procession of purity and peace was expressive also of the symbolical union of matter (in the form of transubstantiated pascal cakes) and the mystical and spiritual fervour which prompted these people; here spirit and matter were co-existent—a state which in itself contradicted the fundamental basis of Marxism.

Easter night. In and around the cathedral crowds of people gathered. They stood, pressed closely against one another, almost motionless, like sheep awaiting the return of their shepherd. Some held above the heads of their fellow-worshippers the Easter cakes which they had not had time to leave at home. They were waiting for midnight. An old lady abruptly crossed herself; a small child began to scratch frantically; from time to time a wave of movement seemed to sweep through this ocean of heads. The long-haired, bearded deacon droned on interminably; then came the sound of liturgical chanting—quiet, humble, but a presage of the great and confounding miracle of the Resurrection.

They had rediscovered their souls, these people. Tomorrow, perhaps, they would continue to pay automatic homage to the Party and the Great Leader—resume their normal status of pawns, to be exploited pitilessly in some gigantic chess-game, for the furtherance of some strategy of which they knew nothing; but tonight they possessed their souls.

A great flame of love and reverence had passed through

them; they were silent, tense, reflective, awaiting—as the Russian people have always awaited—the dawn of the Resurrection. They seemed noble-hearted, powerful, monumental, and I found my heart warming to them strangely.

In the cathedral and on the square lights now began to flicker, for in every hand was a small lighted candle. This fairyland of countless, tiny, trembling flames cast a pattern of pale brilliance and dark shadows upon the faces and shining eyes of the crowd.

Midnight. The bells of Moscow rang out. The priests burned incense before the icons and the people, crying “The Lord is risen!” From the faithful came the response: “He is risen indeed.” The murmuring of voices was like the sea, withdrawing, rising again to a roar and then once more receding.

The choirs sang the Resurrection. First came a litany, mournful, almost incongruous: the clear high voices were restrained by the muffled basses, but by degrees disengaged themselves to rise in a crescendo, fluctuating between major and minor, as if in an attempt to escape from the all-enclosing night. Then they returned along the path they had lately taken, to raise and accompany the basses to an explosive peak of joy—the exultant victory over death itself.

The music soared, passionate, poignant, charged with a divine radiance which illuminated the ecstatic figures waiting there in the night. The tapers trembled; the air was heavy with incense; the ornaments of the officiating priests shone with gold; kisses were exchanged, and beneath the vaulting arose a vague murmur from the depths of the congregation. Moscow and Russia had suddenly ceased to exist; there existed nothing now but brotherhood between me and these men and women, who prayed and suffered with the rest of the world and who now, for once at least in their lives, were experiencing this breath of great and life-giving hope.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Stalingrad

STALINGRAD has become a name which at once stirs the consciousness and summons a vision of suffering, hope and deliverance. I had longed to see this Russian landmark and was anxious, too, that the imaginative sense of my eldest son (then aged thirteen) should benefit by a visit to the scene of such ferocious energy, resolution and suffering. In June, 1949, shortly after my return from the Caucasus, we left together by train.

Towards the end of the journey the train ran alongside the Volga and we found ourselves craning for a first glimpse and impression of the city. But the train proceeded by a circuitous route, ran through a district containing wooden houses and finally drew to a halt in a newly constructed station. Here we were met by the Intourist guide, a sad-looking woman. We climbed into a new car and were taken to the hotel by way of a wide avenue, lined by occasional bare walls. The hotel itself had just been completed; it rose, solitary, to face an enormous square, the boundaries of which were marked by heaps of stone. Near to us passed a trolley-bus and some lorries loaded with material, but very few people were to be seen.

“Everybody is at work,” said our lady-guide in a subdued voice, as if we were in some sanctuary.

I could not yet feel that this was Stalingrad: I had still to sense the beat of a city’s heart. Around me were only isolated walls and piles of rubble—a cruel desolation of the kind I had already encountered in Warsaw, Dortmund and Berlin. These were ruins—hardly the city of Stalingrad!

The low voice of the guide informed me that a representative of the local Soviet had been informed of my visit and would be arriving in a few moments in order to conduct me personally. This was the first—and was to be the only—occasion on which my reception could have been described as semi-official. I was frankly delighted.

The man in question turned out to be a highly placed Soviet official. He was tall and thin, wore a Lenin-type peaked cap and was dressed in the black civil uniform of the Soviet Union. His manner was calm, frank and, at first, inclined to be reserved. In offering to show me the battle-sites he said that later, if I wished, the Intourist guide would take me for a trip on the Volga. I agreed to the programme.

We then sat down and I was obliged to undergo a long account of the various actions which had been fought during both the civil war in 1920 and the "patriotic war" in 1942. Our visit was to include battle-sites from both periods and I was to become acquainted with Tzaritsin (as the city was named prior to 1920) before Stalingrad itself.

We set off across the featureless, almost waterless kalmuk steppe. A hot, turbulent wind, reminiscent of the African *khamsin*, was throwing up dense spirals of dust; all trace of human habitation and activity had already vanished; here we were, at less than seven miles from the city, in a region where sand and wind reigned supreme.

We passed some travellers who had protected themselves against the driving sand by covering their faces, rather in the manner of Arab nomads. A silence had fallen upon my guide and I found my thoughts turning towards actions fought in the Sahara and to a consideration of desert warfare in general. It was not hard to imagine the encamped might of the Golden Horde and Mongolian horsemen surging out of the steppe through this burning, penetrating sand which now enveloped us.

"Here it is," said my companion, suddenly bringing me down to earth.

In its barest terms the battle ground of Tzaritsin amounted

to nothing more than a sunken roadway. This was all I needed to know and I confess that it was with only half an ear that I listened to the long explanations of my guide concerning a chapter of the Revolution which had led to the rise of Stalin. The steppe, on the other hand, quite overwhelmed me. This vast plain, stretching away to the West, conveyed a very real—an almost physical—sense of the scope and magnitude of operations which have to be undertaken by the modern army. I realised the futility of assessing such distances by any scale familiar to us in France or in Western Europe. Here was excellent mental preparation for anybody who sought to reconstruct the Soviet retreat to the Volga and Stalingrad.

Before returning to Stalingrad our guide insisted upon one further visit, this time to the excellently arranged Civil War museum. As we reached the exit, he turned and said, not without solemnity, "You had to see Tzaritsin before Stalingrad for Tzaritsin proved the turning point of the civil war, just as Stalingrad proved that of the late war. You can understand now how the city comes to occupy the place it does in our hearts." It was true; the parallel had not occurred to me. I had now gained a further insight into the Soviet mentality and looked forward eagerly to Stalingrad itself.

It was like entering some private enclosure: here again were the well-cleared streets, the trams, trolley-buses, electric cables, cars—all the evidence of normal life. Yet I found my eyes lingering on the solitary walls and the broken shells of houses everywhere about me. I felt stirred to my depths by the ancient ghosts and memories present in this place. Here, beneath a large and newly-built store had been the forward command post of General von Paulus, while at a distance of little more than five hundred yards lay that of General Zhukov: two cellars, so very adjacent! Over there was the "Pavlov house," named after a sergeant who had defended it, floor by floor, for several weeks, and the staircases of which had witnessed hand-to-hand fighting.

My guide spoke slowly. "The city was occupied by

thirty-six Nazi divisions. The whole population rose to arms: civilians were drafted, workers from the 'Red October' factory formed a regiment; we all helped to defend the city."

"Were you yourself there at the time?"

"I was there, too. We didn't yield!"

Here was the same pride as shown by the woman who had directed me one evening in Leningrad.

Through his eyes I seemed to relive those dark hours: the exploits of the sharpshooters; the advance of the Germans as, step by step, they strove to reach the river—succeeding at two points; the obstinacy of the city defenders as they contested each single house—a desperate army which (in his words) converted itself into a blood-soaked millstone for the grinding down of the invader!

We left the cleared streets, walked through the debris and finally reached the Volga. Here boats were unloading sacks of cement on to the quays, where they were handled by women-dockers, broad-built and with their legs disfigured by varicose veins. A tiny railway had been set up for the use of children. Some barges were making their way up river from the Caspian.

"Look behind you," said my guide. "Would you like to have a closer look at those holes in the cliff yonder?"

We climbed the length of the white cliff until we had reached these former dug-outs of the Soviet soldiers, situated at less than a mile away from the fighting line.

"Here they rested, sang, and waited. . . ."

My companion paused, then added, "From here they could see their beloved Volga."

In his eyes there lurked a trace of emotion. I understood then, more than ever, what a Soviet officer meant when, in 1941, at the beginning of the Russian-German war, he said to me, "They can take Leningrad, attack the Ukraine—*nichts weiter!* We'll fight and defend ourselves. But they'll never be able to take Moscow—our heart, or pass beyond the Volga—our mother. There we shall become fury itself!"

The Volga flowed on serenely. Here also the Soviet Navy

had distinguished itself, keeping open shore-to-shore communications and maintaining a supply route across the water. After a relief army had been brought up from the East—from the depths of Asia—and secretly, methodically, patiently, had grouped upon the left bank, a navy flotilla it was that one night transported them across the Volga.

A Volga flotilla, inseparable from the Army; the Ladoga flotilla, which had ensured essential supplies for Leningrad; the Dnieper flotilla, units of which I had seen in Berlin. . . . They had all won renown; but it was the Volga flotilla which had most endeared itself to the nation.

My guide continued. "All that's in the past. Now we must get down to work."

He gave me an account of the reconstruction problem which had faced Stalingrad after the war. It was divided into two phases: the first, which had been completed, involved the restoring to working order of factories, transport and communications; the provision of wooden houses for the workers in the suburbs and near the factories; the setting up of catering facilities and also, in the centre of the city, the construction of buildings for official and cultural purposes, such as a city hall, the Intourist hotel, schools, a cinema and a theatre. The completion of the second phase, during which destroyed houses were to be replaced, was planned for 1955.

"This evening, at the theatre, we are celebrating Pushkin's 150th anniversary. If you would like to come, you can judge for yourself the extent of our progress. Turn up for the second half—the songs and ballet; the first will consist mainly of speeches and those might weary you."

At the appointed hour I entered the auditorium, together with my son, who thoroughly deserved this little reward, in view of the somewhat arduous day he had spent (absorbing though he had found it). The place was packed, but in the central aisle, nearly touching the stage, two chairs had been placed in readiness for our arrival. As our host saw us into them, he announced to the nearby members of the audience,

“Representatives of France.” I was touched by this, since in the Soviet Union remarks were seldom lightly made.

We returned in darkness though the quiet city. The silence, heavy, oppressive, in no way resembled that of the countryside, where the air is continually alive with muffled murmurings of sound. It was the silence of ruins.

Once the excitement of my visit to the city was over, I experienced a profound sadness: sadness as I watched the drawn-looking citizens returning home in the evening to their dug-outs, cellars and shacks, after leaving drab, exhausting queues in front of the public cafeterias or the occasional shop; a sadness, too, which seemed to seep contagiously from the inhabitants themselves.

“In Stalingrad now we possess only our breath—this and monuments to the dead. Nothing more.” a lady remarked to me, somewhat timidly.

Someone else said, “It’s better just to forget. All that is left is life in the future—or is it life beyond?”

Lastly, the old man: “We’ve had our fill of stupidity and war and want no more of it. Of course, if the Americans attack us we shall defend ourselves successfully and repel them; but we’ve better things to do.”

The Intourist guide now assumed charge of us, taking us first to the new cinema and then for a trip on the Volga.

We embarked on the river-bus and were conveyed across to the other bank and downstream by some magnificent gardens. The Russian plain now lay behind us and to the East were the approaches to Kazakhstan. This was the Volga: we were poised between Europe and Asia.

A large paddle-steamer churned its way down from Samara to Astrakhan; some tugs disengaged themselves from a string of barges and made off to the port. Here, on the Volga, shacks and ruins seemed far distant; the factories lay away to the North and Stalingrad had again become a symbol.

Before leaving by plane for Moscow, I tried to find words

to thank the guides, whose attentions had made our stay in Stalingrad so illuminating.

"Please don't mention it," replied the Soviet official. We have been very pleased to meet you and your son and to have been able to show you round our city. Being a Frenchman, you will understand what I mean when I say that Stalingrad is our Verdun, and be better able to appreciate the significance we attach to this city."

These words were still running through my head as we made for Voronezh. I looked down. Below me appeared a bend in the Don. It was here that the might of Germany had been routed.

## CHAPTER XIV

# Bread and Circuses

UPON the wall of the Red Square entrance to the Lenin Museum appeared the following well-known words: *Religion is the opium of the people.* On the basis of this pronouncement and doubtless with the moral welfare of the public in mind, “opium” of the religious variety was in disfavour; yet could it truly be said that no other kinds of opium existed for the people of the Soviet Union?

All governments, and particularly totalitarian governments, feel the need to assert themselves in the eyes of the people they control; but this requires that they should at the same time offer those people some compensation of a soothing variety. The alternative would be anarchy. The first measure, that of assertion, makes necessary a policy based upon authority and prestige—one might term it “bluff”—in both the home and international fields; the second measure, that of compensation, prompts the dictator in question to offer the people some form of “opium” which, insofar as it satisfies the inward and deeply felt aspirations of the majority, they will find palatable. Hitler doled out good houses, good clothes—everything required to make his people feel *gemütlich*: the German housewife was delighted with her electric cooker, her bathroom and well-polished home; everybody walked about singing, quite loaded down with contentment. Thanks to these conditions, Germany was able to dispense with butter and embark upon the conquest of the world.

The Soviet dictatorship, also, understood the people with whom it had to deal and, while promising them ideal standards

of living for the future, had likewise hit upon a suitable form of "opium." They were given wonderful theatre and ballet which enabled them to forget their earthly life and, by entering and living in the action represented, to give free rein to their tremendous imaginative and assimilative powers. This condition permitted the régime to banish liberty of thought and to embark upon an ideological conquest of the world.

Opium for the people . . .? It was ladled out aplenty at the opera, the theatre, both in the capital cities and throughout the Union; it was conveyed in every movement of Ulanova, Lapishinskaya and those other delightful ballerinas whose grace, it appeared, was but an illustration of Marx-Leninism. Perhaps, after all, the whole business was no worse than baseball-matches or the French *Tour de France* races.

The ancients knew the process well: they called it *Bread and Circuses*.

Since only a strictly limited number of guests were invited to Red Square for the 1st May and 7th November celebrations, the general public had no chance of attending the imposing military display and could participate only in the general air of gaiety associated with the review and march-past. They required, then, some kind of show or spectacle of their own. This came at the end of July in the form of an air display.

The preparations for Air Force Day were far more subdued than those which preceded 1st May. Occasionally one saw rehearsing planes or read an enthusiastic article announcing the event. This took place at Tushino, in the neighbourhood of Moscow. The road to the aerodrome was profusely decorated with flags, either red or in Soviet Air Force colours (in design the latter flags somewhat resembled the Japanese). It was heavily guarded by policemen who were stationed in the small roadside gardens beyond the town in order to keep away the inhabitants. No precaution was too extreme, for Stalin himself was shortly to pass this way.

At Tushino itself everything had been perfectly organised.



ARMENIAN DANCERS PERFORMING IN MOSCOW

METALLURGICAL WORKERS ON VACATION IN THE URALS





The green was filled by a great concourse of people and the whole scene suggested a country-fair or race-meeting. A ripple of movement ran through the crowd when Stalin mounted the central stand and then, with enormous gusto, the show began. A formation of Dosav\* planes drew near and, without changing formation, proceeded to trace in the sky the words "Glory to Stalin." This betokened a remarkable technique and degree of training. During the items that followed military planes performed flying exercises and aerial acrobatics. The display concluded with a mock battle between fighters and bombers, a mass descent of parachutists and, flying past in a bunch, a number of extremely fast prototypes. To foreign observers these last gave food for thought; to Press correspondents, an opportunity to write articles of a highly sensational (if somewhat suspect) nature.

The public was enthralled: it had witnessed a most successful parade and one which, fittingly enough, had been organised by the son of their Leader himself—Air Force General Vassili Stalin. They returned to the city where, in the evening, they were able to watch the usual mammoth firework display (this time not followed by a loan-appeal!).

May 1st and November 7th could be considered as days devoted to the Army and, perhaps, by extension, to the Armed Forces in general. The Tushino celebrations took place on Air Force Day, but other Arms, also, such as the Artillery, Tanks and Signals, had their own particular days; however, since these were celebrated more quietly they passed almost unnoticed by the general public.

Navy Day had more sparkle about it and was celebrated particularly in ports such as Tallinn, Leningrad, Sebastopol, Murmansk and Vladivostock. It included a naval review and a great variety of the features usually associated with such an occasion. In Moscow it created less of a stir, although one

\* Dosav: An auxiliary organisation for the training of pilots which was incorporated in 1951 with corresponding Army and Navy organisations.

year some naval launches put in an appearance on the Moskva.

I attended the festivities which took place at the river-port of Khimki, by the entrance to the Moscow-Volga canal. We were received in a corner of the port, where a huge area of water had been reserved for the use of the Dynamo team. There were the usual diving-boards, pools and also stands for the spectators, who were fairly numerous and consisted for the most part of sailors, accompanied by their families. There was a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere about the function: no feeling of police supervision; no waiting for the arrival of terribly important officials; it was just a happy occasion.

The programme could hardly have been called original: rowing-boats, sailing-boats, a water-polo match, divers and also a massed armada of swimmers, pushing before them a huge placard bearing a portrait of Stalin. All the participants gave of their best, with the exception of a diver from the Pacific Fleet who indulged in a number of buffooneries and seemed to be poking fun at the authorities and the public. But his light-hearted improvisations were very soon cut short. That gay young spark would have earned himself a spell of confinement in any of the world's navies!

All in all, it was pretty poor stuff and one of our hosts, seemingly embarrassed, apologised for it. True, there was nothing to compare with the spectacular fly-pasts or the mass-marching on Red Square, but I had sensed here a very good atmosphere—verging on graciousness—and that meant a great deal. The occasion was not repeated, at least during my stay, and Navy Day celebrations continued to be confined to naval ports. I can only suppose that they had intended something different: to astonish the foreigners, perhaps, or to outdo the soldiers and airmen.

It was upon such public holidays as these that the Soviet people came into contact with their Armed Forces. They loved the sight of the uniforms, the pomp, the show, the soldiers marching all in line, the decorations and the military

music; they applauded the white gloves of the sailors; they were impressed by the tanks and jet planes. They were made to feel the might of their country—a factor of prime importance to the régime which had brought that might into being.

The only trouble was that these celebrations were organised by the régime, so that the enthusiasm displayed, even if very genuine, seemed devoid of spontaneity. It was for this reason that I always preferred to see the Soviet citizens amuse themselves in a more natural way. The theatres and concerts were well enough, but one was always slightly oppressed by the feeling that here some ulterior cultural motive was at work. Surely, the truly festive occasion, which represented the spirit of the people and was truly prodigal of "opium" was one upon which they rediscovered themselves and were moved without the assistance of some lecturer, teacher or "cheer-leader." Such an occasion was provided by a theatrical performance based on Russian, Georgian or Tartar traditions and folk-lore.

Two companies, the Moiseyev and the Alexandrov, were much in favour with the public and appeared frequently in Moscow. I was as keen an admirer and as enthusiastic in my reactions as any other member of the audience.

The Moiseyev was a choreographic company and its dances and music were drawn from popular sources. The ballerinas were pretty and graceful, their male partners skilful, supple, and athletes in every sense of the word. The costumes, drawn from every corner of the Soviet Union—Russia, the Ukraine, the Carpathians, the Caucasus and Asia—were rich and dazzling. It was a triumph of colour and rhythm; a complete harmony of movement as exemplified in the most highly organised ballet. The audience were wide-eyed and breathless; they sat tense in their seats and, as soon as the last step was completed, broke into stamping and other expressions of wild joy. Such enthusiasm on the part of the public I had already witnessed at performances of an operatic and classical character; but at these the public had been moved by the

impact of an emotion which came from outside them. There, they applauded an author who had touched some familiar and moving chord in their natures: here, they surveyed, as it were, a reflection. I am convinced that they paid no heed to the theme which Moiseyev had felt obliged to develop after 1949 in his *Two May Days*; this production was charged with propaganda and claimed to be educative and Marxist, but the movements of the dancers allowed one to forget this and the work contained some excellent features.

The Alexandrov company featured songs and dances of the Army. The songs were in the main adapted from those sung in the old Imperial Army and many of the melodies dated from Revolution days. Most of them were very beautiful and all were carried along by a sense of rhythm and a superb interpretation of the melody itself.

Unfortunately, here again, an offering had to be laid upon the altar of domestic propaganda in the form of military songs composed in accordance with the Party line. These outbursts seemed to amount to nothing more than a series of rather flurried, jerky marches in honour of the advancing Soviet armies, or Chinese-Russian friendship; the only emotion or melody contained in them was suggestive of a man being rushed and jostled along. It was all rather feeble and laborious. How one longed for the song of some passing regiment, or of the girl who awaited her soldier sweetheart's return. . . .

Sporting events were keenly attended. "Physical Culture" Day was a day for the masses, although it, too, carried something of an official atmosphere.

Association football league games were very popular and reminded me of similar occasions at home in France, for here also tempers were hot and the language free. I attended some cup-final or other between the Dynamos and a team from the provinces, held at the Dynamo Stadium. In my view the match proved to be nothing short of sensational, not so much for the quality of the play as for the outburst of public feeling

it provoked. The Dynamo teams were composed of M.V.D. members and the one playing that day was celebrated; however it was not performing as well as usual and the players, rather rattled, began to indulge in irregular play and moments of savagery. The imprecations of the howling crowd began to take on something of a personal character:

“Brutes! Ruffians! You’re on a football-field now—not in the streets, knocking people about. . . . You’re out of uniform now—only the best man wins here!”

I felt almost sorry for the poor wretches undergoing such insults. This explosion of popular sentiment suggested people who had long been suppressed. As the Dynamo team left the ground, beaten, a quite incredible burst of applause greeted their conquerors.

Encouraged by this somewhat unorthodox demonstration of feeling and in order to see just how satire of Soviet institutions was contrived on the stage, I resolved to visit the theatre. The title looked intriguing: *Fakir for an Hour*. The house, as usual, was packed. It was a comedy of errors with a rather banal theme which featured a manager of a provincial hotel who had succeeded in mixing up two guests, one an ordinary traveller, the other a magician. It contained no satire, unless, possibly, ridicule of the simple-minded and a rather limp dig at a hotel employee who, instead of working, pinned an “Out of Order” notice on his lift and then retired to the office for a smoke.

However, I did not give up so easily and attended several plays of this type. One, I remember, took place in the Arctic and was wearilyingly childish; another, more like an operetta but no less painful, took place on a river-steamer; but all seemed to feature lazy characters, the bureaucrat who had failed to understand the Plan, the enlightened Communist who won all hearts and seemed ever destined for some brilliant future career. . . .

Genuine satire, intelligent, mordant, malicious, I discovered only at the circus. There, an extremely talented clown man-

aged to perform some remarkable verbal feats at the expense of foreigners, and this without once casting doubt upon things Soviet.

I was forced to conclude that satire directed at the régime and its manifestations simply did not exist; at least, not openly.

## CHAPTER XV

### Empire of the North

**I**N the summer of 1949 the cruiser *Molotov* left Sebastopol for the Caucasus with Stalin on board. The Black Sea Fleet—and, in a wider sense, the Soviet Navy—were much stirred by this and were not long in announcing to the rest of the Union the outstanding importance of the “historic act.” By this time I was so accustomed to reading that this or that (apparently mild) development was fraught with historic significance that I was little disposed to share in a general enthusiasm which, at best, was of an artificially created nature. Understandably enough, however, the Black Sea Fleet, and particularly the *Molotov*, were bursting with pride.

This voyage served in a remarkable way to spotlight the Soviet Navy and I was sufficiently infected by the atmosphere created to wish myself once more in naval surroundings. In the Autumn, therefore, I resolved upon a trip to Odessa. Sebastopol I should have greatly preferred, but the Crimea was forbidden to foreigners. Odessa at least meant finding the sea again!

Odessa was a commercial port but, being also a secondary naval base, was solidly fortified and defended. For this reason I expected to find, failing naval ships, some coastal defence naval units. Such units were commanded, oddly enough, by generals, for it was possible to make a career in Coastal Defence in the same way as in the Engineers, Cavalry or the ocean-going Navy. Naval school training was not necessary, since the coastal artillery school at Riga provided the necessary personnel; these, in the course of time, were promoted colonels.

and generals, but never naval captains or admirals. A similar system applied to the naval air command. It seemed that *esprit de corps* was as keen here as elsewhere in the world!

This Ukrainian city had a touch of the Mediterranean about it; yet it was also a busy Russian city, large, beautiful and built in the classical French style of Richelieu. From the windows of the principal hotel I looked over the port which lay stretched out at the foot of the hill and was approached by a monumental flight of steps, the same from which, according to the film, *Battleship Potemkin*, troops once fired upon the crowd during an uprising. Beyond, lay the shattered dockland area with its quays and workyards; the uncleared ruins bore witness to the actions which had been fought in this region. Efforts at reconstruction had been made and, in spite of the rough working conditions, the port was again usable. But where was the bustle of Rotterdam, Antwerp, Genoa, Glasgow and Marseilles? Odessa only conjured up again the uneasy and all too persistent impression of neglect and abandon common to this land.

The town itself, on the other hand, seemed lively enough: one accepted once more the general appearance of Soviet streets and houses—the peeling façades, the paint-blisters, the erupting pavements and highways—and turned rather to the passing scene.

We were at the extreme end of the Ukraine: this was no longer Russia. The people were gay, talkative and bore the stamp of individuality. They lounged about or window-gazed and in no way resembled the herded citizens of the Moscow parks. In the street a hawker disposed of second-hand books on behalf of some shop or other (a common enough sight in the Union), but—in marked contrast to his gloomy, indifferent Moscow counterpart—he kept up a flow of patter and seemed to find pride and enjoyment in his work. A road-mender, apparently in no great hurry, described his working methods to a group of children; a little farther off, an electrician, perched on top of his ladder, was singing away to himself—a curiosity

## EMPIRE OF THE NORTH

in a land where all activities are indulged in communally and such "private" singing could be taken to imply individualism and the existence of a separate personality! Even the government commission-shops with their noisy shouts and bursts of mock indignation had something of an eastern bazaar about them.

The women here achieved a certain elegance; they seemed more graceful than their northern sisters and I noticed some, aged about fifty, who had assuredly belonged to the former gentility. Their faces were pleasant and refined and they bore about them an air of quiet distinction; some, indeed, were of markedly aristocratic appearance.

*Carmen* was running at the theatre—a great favourite with the Soviet public, as also were (and equally inexplicably) *Les Cloches de Corneville*, *Faust* and *Lakmé*. The theatre building compared well with the Bolshoi and Kirov. The audience seemed animated and during the interval mingled freely, chatting and laughing ; how different from the northern habit of slow perambulation and subdued conversation! Odessa possessed no such discipline. I was greatly astonished to hear a group of young women speaking French; whether this was affectation or a reaction against too rigid standards of behaviour, I do not know, but it caught my attention. I recalled what had been said to me by the young daughter whom I had encountered in the train whilst travelling to the Caucasus. "And why shouldn't we be talking French? After all, it's the language of our class, and I don't care what people say or think about it!"

The theatre afforded a measure of liberty and relaxation, but the Park of Rest and Culture, also, provided the weary visitor with an escape from enforced propaganda. Perched high on the cliff in splendid isolation, he could watch the sea breaking along the coastline below or, by making his way through an area crowded with holiday-homes, could attain the further blissful solitudes of a pleasant beach.

However, Odessa did not so easily escape the Soviet grip.

While it was impossible to curb the natural gaiety and exuberance of her inhabitants, the central authorities had numerous and varied means of inspiring grave misgivings in any person tempted to divergences of thought: lectures, public meetings, posters and other propaganda were all at hand to instruct the public concerning the Party line and maintain their feet upon the right path. If, at heart, the public was embittered by these manifestations, it took good care not to show it.

I encountered the Navy in an odd and unexpected fashion, not upon the sea-front, but in a restaurant. It was late evening—in the Soviet Union a time when diners, suffused with post-prandial well-being, took to moving about from table to table, chatting with one another. Eventually, a young sub-lieutenant came to where I sat alone, finishing my meal, introduced himself ("Mikhail Kirillovich" plus something with "ko" in it—all spoken in the Ukrainian manner) and sat himself down. In order to spare him any unexpected shocks, I announced my identity. He seemed delighted and we sat there chatting about one thing and another until at length I noticed an Arctic decoration amongst the many others he was wearing. Service in the Arctic implied a life devoid of comfort and endured in an extremely inhospitable region of the world. I let him know how impressed I was. This pleased him greatly and, little by little, he began to give me an account of life in the Arctic Circle, as lived by himself and other sailors.

It seemed grim: the summers were nightless, but there were plenty of mosquitoes, while the landscape itself was a further depressing influence. Winter entailed the dual horror of perpetual night and perpetual cold. I could readily believe that the average daily consumption of vodka per person was in the neighbourhood of five hundred grammes (about a pint).

"Alcohol is our sun!" he repeated time and time again.

It was plain that he had resigned himself to this life. He told me how some men had come great distances to live out their months and years beneath this succession of polar days

and nights; had stayed there to mine from the earth the nickel and other metals necessary for running an industry situated several thousand miles distant; had maintained the fishing industry, strategic vantage-points and also helped to keep the sea free from ice. As if the polar nights were not hardship enough without the lunacy of the world forcing men to dwell upon such matters as maximum turnover, war and death!

I ordered some white Tsinandali wine and vodka, courageously launched myself upon another meal, composed of fruit, and began speaking in my turn.

"I've sailed a bit in my time, Mikhail Kirillovich, and remember those seas up north being full of fishing craft. I suppose the Barents Sea is much the same?"

"Well, I don't know about those you saw, but we've all the Murmansk trawlers up there and even a few of yours."

He went on talking, now about Murmansk itself.

"Nothing but trawlers," he said, "trawlers with the letters P.T. (fishing vessel) plus a number, all making their way out to sea. There's fish enough up there to supply the local food combine."

Familiarity with the fishing population of Boulogne and Paimpol made it easy for me to understand the problems and interests common to all who wrest their living from the sea and to picture the life he described. The struggle against the elements was waged independently of political systems, the only difference being that in France the catch went to the fish-mongers and here to undertakings run by the State.

Arctic navigation, on the other hand, was a province peculiar to Murmansk and those other great ports strung out between the White Sea and the Bering Strait—a common interest of commercial, but also military, importance. Whilst listening to my companion, I recalled the case of the German cruiser *Schiff 45 Komet* which, in September, 1940, drew upon the facilities of the North Siberian sea-route to make her way from Europe to the Pacific Ocean, where she engaged in warfare against Allied commercial shipping.

"The post-war Plan," said my Arctic Pioneer, pouring himself out a brimmer, "provides for the normal utilisation of the northern sea-route."

I had read as much, but my mind marvelled at the scale of effort which would be required, in climatic conditions as rigorous as these, to maintain and continue projects begun so many years ago. Such a setting befitted the exploit of a certain flotilla whose remarkable circumnavigation I had seen described in the papers. Mikhail Kirillovich began to give me a personal account of it. . . .

Around us floated the smoke and noisy talk of the other diners; in a far corner of the room a discreet band was playing Ukrainian melodies. By what curious alchemy had our spirits become conjured away to the Arctic and our bodies abandoned in this southern setting? But my friend was reliving the saga of his flotilla. . . .

The project entailed the transfer from Leningrad of a formation of tugs and trawlers (about twenty vessels, if I remember correctly) to the mouths of the Ob and Yenesei, on which rivers they were to be put into service.

From Leningrad to the White Sea was plain sailing: the route followed Lake Ladoga, the River Svir, Lake Onega and the Stalin Canal as far as Bielomorsk on the White Sea. Beyond this point things became more difficult: the river-craft were not designed for open waters and had to be watched very carefully, a task undertaken by the Soviet Navy.

Units of the Northern Fleet (based mainly at Murmansk) took charge of the procession which now, except for the fact that enemy interference no longer had to be reckoned with, bore all the appearance of a wartime convoy.

"But," remarked Mikhail Kirillovich, "first and last a ship's toughest enemy remains the sea itself. I suppose that in a manner of speaking we sailors always have some fight or other on our hands."

The "fight" in this particular case had to be waged without respite over approximately a thousand sea-miles—a route be-

devilled with currents, fog and, in all likelihood, great masses of drifting ice.

The flotilla set off in good order and, hugging the Kola Peninsula, made for Cape Kanin at a comfortable six to eight knots. Beyond Cape Kanin came the Barents Sea. All polar stations and air units were alerted, regional H.Q.s were working overtime and many a meteorological station must have well exceeded its work-norm! Thus, whilst remaining nominally under the command of the Northern Fleet, the convoy passed through the hands of a smooth-running organisation. The details furnished by my companion who, throughout his recital, never ceased to demonstrate that vodka, beer and wine were all one to him, helped to complete in most eloquent fashion such information concerning the general management of this northern sea-route as I had already been able to glean from a maritime exhibition held in Moscow and also from my assorted reading. Clearly, such an organisation would be concerned with everything affecting the route, not only of a navigational but also of an economic nature. This modern "India Company" possessed naval and air equipment, harbour facilities, a river-fleet, shipyards, workshops, its own mineral and agricultural resources, training schools and specialised personnel. It exercised complete control over all these northern territories.

The concern of the organisation, with its enormous sub-structure, was arctic navigation; but although the ships in question kept fairly close to shore, navigation in these latitudes had little in common with cabotage which, in normal waters, was carried on even during adverse weather conditions. The route might be pronounced "ice-free," but this was only a way of saying that it was navigable; in some form or other ice was always present and where the prevailing wind had piled it up in a confined area the services of an ice-breaker might be required. Ships which habitually plied in the Arctic or other ice-infested waters were especially equipped with a reinforced stem which acted as a shock-absorber.

Observers posted the length of the North Siberian route relayed reports on ice movements to information centres, where the necessary summaries and instructions were prepared for retransmission to convoys at sea. There were ground observers in the numerous polar stations dotted about the islands, air observers reporting during the course of their long-ranging "ice patrols" and also, since every ship in the area fulfilled the role of weather-station, observers on the sea itself.

The flotilla of tugs and barges to which my friend had been referring left Cape Kanin and thence proceeded with good meteorological cover by way of Vaigatch Island, the Kara Sea and White Island. The weather was good, the ice loose, and everything went off very smoothly. After White Island the convoy separated into two sections, one entering the Ob estuary and proceeding to Salekhard, the second continuing to the Yenesei Gulf and winding up at Dudinka. The whole operation was a very great technical achievement which, apart from the advantage gained by the transfer of these craft to navigation on the Ob and Yenesei, reflected considerable credit upon the Murmansk fleet and the organisation concerned with this northern sea-route.

Convoys from Murmansk or the White Sea making their way eastwards had first to cross the Kara then the Laptev Sea before tackling the major difficulties presented by Eastern Siberian waters—a nasty corner of the world, the exploration of which had cost dear in effort and suffering. In the course of this long journey the navigators were greeted by ports which had literally sprung from the tundra and the estuary banks of the great Siberian rivers: Dickson, Salekhard, Dudinka, Tiksi, Ambarchik. . . .

"There are great things going on up there," said my companion; "enough to inspire any young man who longs for constructive action."

How well I understood this man! His excitement glowed and mounted even as he spoke and sought to share his enthu-

siasm with me. I understood him because I had before me the vision of those great French colonists and sailors of the past. They, also, had embarked upon the discovery of the world and pushed back the physical horizons of France overseas; their names still lived on the maps of the territories they had administrated. I could now understand why many of the young men leaving the Naval School in Leningrad were eager to serve in the Northern or Pacific Fleets: it was the equivalent of our service abroad, for, unlike our own midshipmen, these lads were unable to cruise in Indian, Pacific or West African waters.

Service in the North. When young, I myself had served in the Baltic and had my share of the ice and snow-storms; indeed, at no time in my whole career had my physical endurance been so sorely tried as by the cold and snow of a certain watch on the bridge in the Gulf of Bothnia. Service in the North was certainly no picnic: but when one is young . . . !

We rambled on ceaselessly, Mikhail Kirillovich concentrating on the vodka and I upon my bottle of Tsinandali wine. Some apples served as a solid base to this repast. Around us people came and went with a casualness which I had always associated with the Mediterranean. In a physical sense we were far removed from the North, yet, with a strange potency, it was to the North that our conversation drew us. The effect of contrast exerted a strange fascination—this and also the thought of those areas of land and sea in which man had given of himself so utterly; where even the memory of physical suffering—if this had served to conquer or had been the ransom paid for an ideal, however imperfectly achieved—became suffused with brightness. Despite the limitations imposed by matter and his own physical nature, the spirit and heart of man drew him on to destinies beyond himself.

Our conversation now turned to the part played by the North in time of war. Probably in order to please me, Mikhail Kirillovich gave me a first-hand account of actions in which the Soviet Navy had been engaged, not only along the

coast but also at sea. Some had involved co-operation with the Army: the harrying of the enemy rear by naval launches; the shelling of enemy positions by destroyers (some of them old crocks dating from pre-1914 days); and the technically difficult landing effected at Petsamo.

The Soviet Navy had been in demand farther afield also. The Germans had skirted the North of Nova Zemlia, having installed bases there, and one of their cruisers had pushed on into the Kara Sea. They had made a land-attack against a radio-station, were about to bombard Dickson, and their submarines had ventured as far as Cape Cheliuskin, sinking a number of Soviet ships en route.

The Soviet Navy was also needed to protect merchant shipping making its way from the United States, both from the East and the West. Convoys coming from the East by way of the northern sea-route could, if menaced in the Kara Sea, find refuge in the Laptev Sea; but those from the West would be heading either for Murmansk or the White Sea and during the greater part of the journey their protection had to be assured by American and British escorts, the Soviet Navy taking over as the convoy neared Russian home waters. These Soviet units did not venture far—indeed, they hardly emerged from the Barents Sea—but, in view of the few ships at their disposal, even this action was sufficient to place a severe strain upon the various headquarters and the ships themselves. It was easy enough to understand why the Soviet Command had requested naval aid from the Allies in the form of a battleship, a cruiser, destroyers and British and American submarines—all duly restored.

Thanks to the vodka, Mikhail Kirillovich was finding it more difficult to express himself clearly.

“The destroyers kept up a non-stop patrol with the help of auxiliary craft drawn from the Murmansk trawler fleet.”

“And your submarines?”

“Ah, they were terrific! They sank the *Tirpitz* off the Norwegian coast.”

"Are you sure that the *Tirpitz* was sunk by your submarines?"

"It comes to the same thing: it wasn't actually sunk by them, but they left it at one end of the *fjord* so severely damaged that it became a sitting target for the Western Allies."

In other words, if the *Tirpitz* had not been torpedoed and immobilised, our planes would never have been able to strike it—which was as good as saying that it was destroyed by Soviet forces!

To deductions of this nature I prefer the silence which enveloped the sinking of the *Scharnhorst* by the British Navy in the same latitudes.

Whilst listening to my friend, I was again reminded of the themes which were often developed concerning an ocean-going Soviet Navy. They echoed a conception voiced by Stalin in the thirties upon the occasion of the founding and installation of the Northern Fleet at the port of Murmansk: an ocean-going Northern Fleet, equipped with submarines, planes and cruisers, crouched upon the edge of the Atlantic and based on an ice-free port near to Iceland and Greenland.

My amiable friend, now completely drunk, had talked himself to a standstill.

On the following day I returned to Moscow by train, sharing my compartment with a smiling Chinaman who had come to sell Malayan rubber to the Russians. The world of business . . . !

I was much taken with the Ukraine and every time I travelled through it surveyed with fresh pleasure the white straw-thatched houses set amongst their golden sunflowers. At night their tiny lights pierced the gloom and transported me instantly into some novel written by Gogol. The limitless steppe yielded up the powerful warmth of the earth. Occasionally a scorching wind swept over it from afar—from the sands of the East, or the vast expanses of nearby Asia. It was wonderful.

I wanted to see more. Since Kiev was at that time a prohibited area, I set off in August, 1950, to visit Kharkov, a city which, in the days of the Imperial Russian Empire, had been the Ukrainian capital and which, in my eyes, came to symbolise the Ukraine itself. Intourist provided accommodation in the form of a hotel room which I shared with a Soviet citizen. It was clean, if comfortless, but there was no mirror and no plug in the wash-basin. The restaurant was fairly well run, but the winter and summer menus seemed identical; I asked unsuccessfully for some of the fruits which I had noticed about me in the market-place, but was informed (reasons were never lacking) that the matter would have been attended to had I only ordered them several hours beforehand.

The city was large and well-kept. It had been badly damaged during the war and, in spite of very good progress with reconstruction, a great number of ruins were still to be seen. The station was but the remains of a station to which some wooden huts had been added; there was no waiting-room. On the open square sat men, women and children, some of whom sprawled out upon the highway itself. For some reason or other they had pulled out from their packages a motley assortment of those articles most precious to them: a saucepan, a picture-frame enclosing a shockingly tinted colour-print, an electric-light switch, a German helmet and so on. Some slept, some read; some obtained provisions and set about a very poor sort of meal; but most of them appeared to be doing nothing at all—not even day-dreaming. They just sat and waited, undemonstrative, taciturn, for all the world like a band of gypsies. They waited, and were prepared to wait several days if necessary, for a train which would carry them farther away—and to further waiting. Their quiet, patient vigil was suddenly interrupted by the yapping and roaring of a loudspeaker. Immediately they arose and rushed to the platform to board their train. They had waited so long and now, apparently, there was not a moment to be lost!

"Well, that's life," an onlooker remarked to me. "And, after all, what's that worth!"

In the city I found a great many cars and the usual long queues standing before shops and stores. Something a woman shopkeeper said to me gave me food for thought. I was buying plums—some of the fruit for which I had asked in vain in the restaurant!—and saw that this lady was handing them to me just as they were, unwrapped. I asked for some paper, saying that I did not see how I could manage otherwise.

"And how do you think other people manage? And in any case, what else can one do when there's nothing to be had? Because we have nothing, you know—nothing, *nothing*."

This last word she repeated with a kind of fury, whilst at the same time wrapping up my plums in a piece of old newspaper unearthed from under the table. Rarely have I witnessed such an outburst of pessimism.

The museum was terribly dull, being devoted to prehistoric history and Stalin—as if humanity had passed directly from the Cromagnon stage to that final product—Soviet Man!

I withdrew into the big parks and gardens above the town. There, surrounded by the flowers and trees, I could watch the carefree children playing, while their elders, less stolid-looking than in Moscow, strolled about, talking endlessly.

The cathedral was not too badly damaged. The evening service was attended by a congregation which, a few moments later, would probably become an enthusiastic audience at the theatre, applauding some play by Ostrovsky.

Back at the hotel I chatted with the other occupant of my room who, owing to the heat of the day, had remained lying upon his bed. We talked about France. But when I said that a French citizen was able to state his opinion in public and even, if need be, criticise the Government, he appeared horrified.

"But one can't do that!" he declared. "One hasn't the right to go against the Government and the authorities—it's a crime!"

Had I been twenty years younger I would have returned to

Moscow by the Yalta-Kharkov-Moscow road service which had been recently inaugurated—a trip of five hundred miles. But I shrank at the sight of the somewhat unprepossessing vehicles and also the passengers who sat on the ground in the middle of their bundles, string shopping-bags, chickens, live ducks and other impedimenta—all awaiting transport.

Very prudently I decided to go by train and booked a “soft” compartment, which I shared with three other travellers. One of them, a man, first tried, without success, to extract information from my time-table, then set about his vodka and ultimately sank into a heavy slumber. The other two were “ladies”: one a strongly-built woman who sported a scarlet dressing-gown; the other thin, deformed, moustached and—as she herself told me—aged fifty-one. On her right index finger she wore a massive brass ring. They talked, ate and drank ceaselessly, pausing only from time to time to anoint their persons with cheap and evil-smelling perfumes. Nothing was omitted: the high cost of living, the cinema, fashions, the most effective way of wiping children’s noses, the grim times we were living in, how selfish men were, etc., etc. It could have been France!

My last hope of sleep was removed when the corridor loud-speaker interrupted an account of coal-mining at Karaganda to make this solemn announcement: “Citizens, we are now approaching Moscow, the capital of our great country.” Then, as we drew into the station, it broke forth into a lively military march.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Omsk

EXCEPT in the case of Leningrad, my love of travel had hitherto inclined me to the South. It may have been that I was instinctively attracted to a Mediterranean-type region, such as Toulon, Anatolia and Greece, because in some way I felt at home there (the French may be attracted to wine-growing countries). Perhaps, also, I felt naturally drawn to the sea and sea-ports. However this may be, I realised one day that I had lived in the Soviet Union for the space of nearly four years and that it would be a good thing if I renewed close contact with the Slavonic continent by pushing as far eastwards as possible and into Siberia.

I hesitated briefly between a number of cities, but my choice finally fell upon Omsk (a fairly old Siberian town, founded in 1804). The name had always filled me with longing, even as a child, and here was a chance both to satisfy my curiosity and also to visit a Soviet city on behalf of which no special effort had been made and which possessed no Intourist organisation. So it was to Omsk that I came on a torrid June afternoon in 1950.

After leaving Molotov (formerly Perm) the train approached the Urals by a series of gentle slopes which later developed into country rather Vosges-like in appearance. Finally it emerged upon the calm, melancholy flatness of the Siberian steppe which stretched away, like a desert, to the eastern horizon.

Time seemed an irrelevance: according to a recent schedule (concerning which the conductor seemed to have no knowledge whatsoever) the train was running ahead of time; but

this gentleman was unable to give me any indication as to the exact length of time the journey would take, or the hour of arrival.

"The official time-table hasn't yet been published, you see, so how can I tell when we are going to arrive? Anyway, what does it matter—on a train journey like this, lasting eight or ten days, a few hours here or there hardly count!"

A wise man indeed!

Since the matter of time had been thus disposed of, there remained nothing for me but to contemplate my fellow-travellers. They were for the most part officers and officials returning to Sakhalin and Kamchatka and the Far East; men and women alike seemed surprisingly lightly dressed and it was plain they considered that mere presence aboard the trans-Siberian mail-train conferred upon them a halo of distinction. They spent roubles like water. There was about this journey a feeling of jollity which nothing seemed to mar (although for many it was to be succeeded by further long road or air travel).

Yet there was that freight train drawn up on a siding in the Urals—closed trucks with grilles let into the wooden sides; and behind these apertures a glimpse of human faces from which stared eyes, large and brilliant. . . .

Then, too, along the track women had been working, engaged, as elsewhere, in ballast and sleeper maintenance; only here, drawn up to the very edge of the embankment, had been observation-posts, barbed wire and sentries. Were other gangs at work behind that wire? The train rumbled on slowly. These gangs now came into view. The men were apparently in good physical shape; some waved their hands to us and smiled; others plodded their way heavily back to the huts; but over all one felt the domination of barbed wire, sentries and observation-posts. They passed beyond my sight. Had the journey been so gay after all?

At last we arrived. The station at Omsk had an obsolete air and was situated at some distance from the town itself.

Since there was no guide map, the local lay-out was quite unfamiliar to me and I turned at last to an old man who had been watching the travellers passing by. He led me to a kind of taxi—a broken-down old wreck of a thing, most antique in appearance. Since he had also carried my bag for a few yards, I wanted to give him a little money, but found that I had only ten-trouble notes. I gave him one. He seemed thunderstruck at first, then bent very low over my hand, kissed it and said in a deep voice, "God bless your Lordship!" Somewhat confused, I said, "You had better say 'Comrade' rather than 'Lordship'"; a reply which hardly repudiated this Siberian form of benediction. Poor old fellow!

I had been warned that there would be no guarantee of accommodation once I arrived at Omsk, but I was prepared to accept anything offered. I went straight to the only hotel and applied to the manager for lodgings.

"Show me your authorisation."

The reaction was understandable enough: it was hard to imagine that I had come to Omsk as a simple tourist. Of course, I did not possess such a document. He then asked why I had come to the town.

"Because I've read *Michael Strogoff*." (That was true enough).

Surprising though it must have been, my reply appeared to satisfy him, for after some discussion he found a bed for me in a room already occupied by two other persons.

I had been lucky. The hotel was packed with people who had been allocated to dormitories, each of which contained from ten to twelve beds. There was no running water, baths or showers. A jug and basin were provided, but no slop-pail, all waste water being shot into the corridor, the street, or the courtyard, according to the whim of the client. For all that, the place was clean, with the kind of cleanliness which is achieved with the aid of evil-smelling disinfectants.

I managed to catch a glimpse of the room next door. The

occupants seemed to have peculiar manners: there was an off-handedness, a complete lack of consideration for others and a freedom in the matter of dress which plainly sprang from a conception of modesty different from my own; yet it all seemed to be tempered by an air of boundless generosity and candour. I saw two officers whose trousers were tumbling despairingly over calves so enormous that even their regulation boots failed to hide them; an engineer of some branch or other (everybody seemed to be an engineer) lay on his pallet, smoking incessantly, while another stolidly mugged up some elementary algebra. There were other persons, too, nondescript, filthy, and looking like tramps. The place was a blend of barracks and doss-house. Hardly anybody spoke.

From time to time a man entered with some salmon, bread and vodka and these people fell to eating and drinking. One of the tramps suddenly began to sing and before long was joined by two of his companions. No sooner had they finished than another started them off again, this time in order to roar out the "Toreador's Song" from *Carmen*. The vodka bottle now stood empty. Judging that they were about to work themselves up into a quarrel, I slipped away.

The town consisted mainly of low wooden houses, with here and there a brick building. The pavements were battered and treeless; on the highway trams groaned and jeeps bumped over the ruts. The crowd, which contained a fair number of slant-eyed Kazakhs, seemed to be milling about everywhere; they stood in long lines before the shops, thronged the municipal gardens or walked sedately by the river, where I also joined them. Later in the evening I visited the large so-called cinema where the first instalment of *Count of Monte-Cristo* (in French with Russian sub-titles) was being shown. These scenes of French life seemed to hold the audience quite spellbound.

The following day I continued my stroll and saw passing me a procession of about three hundred young men which was divided up into three sections. These youths, aged about twenty, had been conscripted for labour duties. Bent beneath

the weight of their bundles, they made their way in a leisurely fashion and with no manifest pleasure, towards the waiting trucks. There appeared to be nothing unusual in this scene, for it passed unnoticed.

The heat was stifling. The itinerant drink-sellers had long since run dry; there was no tree to give shade and a fine tenacious dust arose from the sand and stones of the highway. This Asian sun was not the one I had known at sea: it fell heavy upon the shoulders—penetrated and overpowered the whole body. People were grumbling bitterly about drinking supplies, but apparently nothing could be done about it. In the restaurant of the town I was obliged to drink Soviet champagne, which is, appropriately enough, red, but sugary and quite abominable.

Siberia was the very embodiment of heat. At first, there appeared to be no escape from it. Then, following my usual custom and here adapting it to the situation, I went to the museum in search of a cooler atmosphere. I was not disappointed.

The museum in itself was not very exciting and was devoted to Siberian agriculture. There were diagrams, graphs and statistics, local ethnological types, notes on habitat and also—somewhat inexplicably—some bad reproductions of well-known pictures. It was curious to note that despite the profound sense of theatre, so wonderfully revealed in big public demonstrations and on the stage, the Soviet authorities have not yet succeeded in arranging their museums adequately.

I walked from room to room and came upon some pictures, a giant-sized map and further diagrams, all dealing with the colonisation of the Great North and also the Arctic sea-route. Only the previous day I had watched steamers leaving for the North, for the Ob, for Salekhard and thence, possibly, for the Kara Sea. Here was a map which showed this northern route stretching across the North of Siberia to link Atlantic with Pacific. The Great North exhibition I had seen in Leningrad was mainly concerned with the effect of the colonisation drive

upon population and regional civilisations; in a Moscow Park of Rest and Culture also I had seen an Arctic exhibition, but this had a technical bias and was more concerned with mechanical developments—the utilisation of wind-power, automatic stations and sounding-balloons. But here, before me, the sea-route was shown in its entirety.

It seemed ironical that the oceanic position of the Soviet Union should be revealed to me in the heart of the land-mass. It was in a rural area, also, that the true range of the Stalinist conception of an ocean-going Soviet Navy had been brought home to me. The Northern Fleet, based on Murmansk, a fleet in the Pacific, and the two connected by Arctic lines of communication—here was a naval expansion along new lines! The reason was not hard to understand. In 1914, as in 1941, Russia, finding herself allied to a maritime power, had concentrated mainly upon land forces. But what was the position today? Apart from their local and restricted role, what was the implication of the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets? They controlled the enclosed waters which fringed the Union, certainly; but was this sufficient, when a simple glance at the map revealed that the Soviet Union opened upon three oceans—the Atlantic, the Arctic and the Pacific? Stalin clearly realised in which direction the Soviet Navy must bend its energies; the term “oceanic”, which so frequently arose whenever naval matters were under consideration, was neither idle nor whimsical.

I had to be getting back to Moscow and so ordered a seat on the plane. The hotel manager, most obligingly and efficiently, made all the necessary arrangements and also saw to the matter of my overnight accommodation at the airport itself.

When I arrived at the airport, around midnight, I was greeted very cordially by a woman-official, who announced that an apartment had been reserved for me. I felt rather sceptical about this when I saw how the other passengers were situated: some were sleeping in the garden itself, stretched out under the shrubbery, others had flopped into chairs, while, in a badly

ventilated hall, some perspiring officers lay on the floor, snoring in unison.

“Apartment reserved for members of the Government” . . . and it was all mine! On the living-room table had been placed a blue plush cloth and the inevitable carafe of water, while elsewhere in the room were some ornamental plants. There was a bathroom (but, of course, no plug), a study (decorated in Empire style) and also a bedroom containing two beds and a telephone. The whole contrasted strangely with the hotel from which I had just emerged; but then, the Soviet Union itself was a land of contrasts!

I was wakened punctually. The plane, which had flown in from Novosibirsk, stood waiting. Soon Omsk—the name which had so beguiled my childhood ears—was melting away behind me into the Siberian plain.

## CHAPTER XVII

### Round and About

THE months passed. In October the first snows fell, only to vanish again very swiftly. With them came the rooks—birds which were always to be seen circling and cawing away mightily in the winter sky, or perhaps making a sudden, violent descent upon one of the Kremlin towers. They were to Moscow what swallows are to us but, since Spring was swallowed up in the brief transition from winter to summer, heralded Winter alone.

These succeeding months, spent in an office and an administrative service so far removed from the influences which had hitherto nourished and sustained my life, could have been tedious indeed; yet I found them varied and instructive, since they enabled me to witness the continuous and varied procession of everyday life around me. In no matter what country I have lived and whatever their tongue, religion or colour, I have always sought close contact with the people; and in all places I have found them to be just ordinary, decent human beings—working, suffering and striving to improve their lot. The Soviet Union was no exception.

Here they were, in Moscow, on the streets, on the tree-lined boulevard which encircled the heart of the city—free for the day. Some strolled about; some sat down and took things easy; on the frozen, bumpy snow children were skating with consummate ease (after the thaw they would endanger the passers-by with football). Their nursling brothers and sisters, with the inevitable comforter, were carried about in a woollen pouch, tied and bandaged into complete immobility, with their

arms stretched down the length of their bodies, a cautious slit being allowed for ventilation. The outfit was at least understandable during the severe cold of winter, but in summer . . . ! This tight-fitting cocoon seemed to presage the restraint to which the future citizen would be subject throughout his life.

A large number of women were engaged upon work of a type normally delegated to men and were employed generally on manual labour. The Constitution supported the principle of assistance to both married and unmarried mothers and also recognised the equal rights of men and women in matters affecting labour, holidays, welfare and education. This was most clearly demonstrated by the fact that it was women who drilled and mended the roads and also worked as dockers, navvies, lorry-drivers, steam-roller operators and factory hands. The system could give rise to some entertaining street scenes, such as that of hefty little ladies heaping noisy insults, with all the vehemence of which their sex is capable, upon the head of some young foreman who had ventured a critical remark; or of fathers taking their children for a walk, perhaps seeing to their inner needs whilst the mothers were elsewhere.

But this could not truly be called equality of rights: it was rather an apparent equality of man and woman in the hardship of work with—for the woman—the various physiological problems entailed by this. She had furthermore to contend with an additional factor—a survival from the old days—that it was still her lot to bring children into the world, to look after them when they were at home and also to do the housework and cooking.

Men and women had one thing in common, however, which in some measure could be termed an essential characteristic of Soviet Man (that new type of human being which was being created for life in a new world): whether in Leningrad, Biro-bijsk or the Caucasus, they all longed for education. To this end they read, constantly and ceaselessly; indeed, the bookshop had come to equal the grocery-store in importance.

Apart from political works, they read anything and everything which came within reach. I received the impression they learned by heart a whole quantity of things which they could trot out, more or less relevantly, at some later date. I recall a worker on the collective farm at Tsinandali who gave me a perfectly memorised account of the geographical and geological characteristics of the Cote d'Azur; and another who came out with statistics—quite sensational, as interpreted by him—upon French steel output. As I listened to them I could not help being reminded of that young Soviet General in the Engineers, whom in 1934 I had piloted around France for the Naval Ministry. He knew everything, had read everything, and upon the subject of naval experimental tanks there was no one to touch him. The only snag was that he had never actually seen the object concerned and was quite baffled when confronted with it.

These Soviet citizens were delighted to find their *x* and *y*, even in the simplest forms, because this was to be scientific and science, they had been told, provided the answer to all questions—even to those which in former days had been couched in philosophic or metaphysical terms. In the Metro, tram or train I saw them murmuring away earnestly over their books, seeking to memorise even the oddest propositions—most proud to have gained access, by their own efforts, to the world of knowledge and science.

I saw these Muscovites again at Zvenigorod, a delightful spot beside the Moskva, with a village set astride some hills, on the tallest of which stood a church. The weather was fine and a great many people had come on their day's holiday to breathe in a little of the countryside. Freed from the constraint of the previous week, they walked about in little groups, laughing and gesticulating in a completely natural and uninhibited way. These young men and women carried no badges of any kind, political or otherwise, and were thoroughly enjoying themselves with the exuberance common to youth.

throughout the world. A young boy, surrounded by laughing companions, was playing an accordion with great gusto; a moment later, abandoning the accordion, they broke into a part-song, giving of themselves and expanding under the influence of the music. This happy scene made me feel quite light-hearted and helped me to forget the turn of thought and method of reasoning imposed by dialectic materialism and maintained continually in the factory workshops, collective farms and "clubs."

Here was a strange new world which, even as it innovated and overthrew century-old standards, found itself frequently obliged to adopt, under another name, the measures of that very society it held in such loathing. It could not escape the rhythmic inter-play of action and reaction to which the whole world was subject: night and day; activity both intellectual and physical; work and relaxation.

For Soviet citizens also enjoyed relaxation. On holidays, the restaurants were always packed—after all, nobody could exist entirely upon fine phrases and in the long run even government canteens grew wearisome. I always found the restaurants entertaining, irrespective of their cooking. The Russian is a sociable person and not afraid to spend his money; when he goes to a restaurant, his one thought is to indulge in the sheer enjoyment of filling his stomach with food and drink. The sight of these figures, bending eagerly over their plates with little thought for niceties of etiquette, may not have been edifying, but it rejoiced my heart insofar as it enabled me to share in an almost physical sense the delight they found in sitting down to table and ministering to the welfare of the inner man!

One evening I dined with my wife and daughter at the *Aragvi*, a Georgian restaurant on Red Square. In charge of the cloakroom was an old man decked out in a faded livery with tarnished buttons and whose wrinkled face was divided laterally by a pair of splendid white moustaches. He gave me no number-check in exchange for the outer garments and

snow-boots committed to his care, yet I knew that at the end of the evening he would return them faultlessly. This same sureness of eye I had already encountered in Stockholm and Helsinki. We descended into a basement which resembled a German *Keller* and led on to another and larger cellar in which tables had been set around an open dance-floor. Above the heads of the diners some murals depicted the major episodes of a well-known Georgian poem by Rustaveli; from the gallery Caucasian instruments gave out mountain melodies or, less happily, tunes of Western origin.

We were taken aback by the noise, smoke and that dreadful reek of burning fat which seemed a feature of all Soviet restaurants. People waved their hands about, waiters served busily, while the *maître d'hôtel* stood ready to conduct to their tables any customers of note. He now hurried towards us seeming, with his pince-nez, tail-coat and imperturbable face, a character more suited to the year 1900. When the would-be diner found this gentleman otherwise engaged or that he himself was not considered worthy of this special attention, things were a good deal simpler, for he had only to sit down at any of the tables, occupied or not, and wait. What did it matter if he had to wait a long time? He had, after all, come to enjoy himself, to talk, eat and drown his sorrows. Although by now fairly accustomed to all this, we never tired of watching the diners talking to one another. Perhaps one would sit down for a moment beside somebody for whom he had conceived a sudden and overwhelming affection, then return, still gesticulating and talking loudly, to his own table; or another would hilariously implant a kiss upon the forehead of some stranger seated at the far end of the room. During the dancing it was quite in order for a man to seek a partner from amongst any of the women present. At about two in the morning some rather cheerful diners flung themselves wholeheartedly into an unrehearsed dance to the accompaniment of hand-claps by the delighted audience. The scene in no way resembled a night club; indeed, in its liveliness and spontaneity it reminded



MARKET SCENE

THE SCHUKIN MUSEUM, MOSCOW





me rather of a party aboard ship. At no time did I observe crude or improper behaviour.

The matter of cuisine seemed of almost secondary importance. It was good of its kind, but heavy and lacking in subtlety and our stomachs found it hard to get used to. However, it was not, in any case, intended for the passing foreigner!

Who frequented the expensive restaurants such as the *Aragvi*, *Ararat*, *Kiev*, *Uzbekistan* and *Baku*? Would there in any case have been much point in cultivating smartness or elegance? The Muscovite went to a restaurant to eat, drink and enjoy a change; if he happened to be flush, he could go to the *Aragvi* or some similar restaurant; if not, then there was always the *shashlichnaya*.\*

In the restaurant one could see mingling together people of every type and social position—a striking microcosm of this new world where etiquette and “good manners,” as we understand them, were unknown; where people from every corner of the Union and from every walk of life were mixed and melted down in an enormous crucible from which was to emerge something more nearly approaching the conception of the Soviet Man.

Sometimes, when I tired of the concerts and theatres and my stomach rebelled against the quantities of rich food, I would set out to take whatever came my way.

The Gipsy Theatre was housed in a cellar and approached by a sloping alley well adapted to ambushes. The seats were hard and the audiences sat pressed close to one another; after all, they did not claim to be at the opera! They chatted, laughed, consumed ices and sausage, clouted their little Vanyas for climbing about on the seats, or sat quietly reading newspapers. The stage consisted of some planks rigged up above the level of the orchestra-pit. These gipsies played instruments, danced and sang songs both in Russian and their own

\* A cheap restaurant specialising in *shashlik*, an Eastern dish consisting mainly of small pieces of grilled and skewered lamb.

tongue. The deep-pitched voices of the women introduced to the singing a sensual and tragic element, thus heightening the effect of music which at times stirred me to the depths.

The dances themselves seemed elemental: now brutal, now voluptuous, with a leg thrust forward and the shoulders shaking and trembling. What with the pure-bred traits of the performers, the brilliant colouring of the costumes, the tinkling of sequins, the alternating moods of gaiety and tragedy and the unbridled pace of it all, I could well understand what fatal charm had been exerted by such women on the young bloods of former days!

I never tired of watching the people and each day learned to understand and hold them in greater affection. Numerous instances made it plain that their good qualities would have found even fuller expression had the owners themselves not experienced, more or less consciously, a feeling of oppressive and inhibiting uneasiness.

One evening, on the Arbat, an old lady sat herself down at the other end of my bench. With her was a small dog on a lead. She kept up a continual flow of grumbling, although I was unable to hear her words distinctly. Suddenly, in a clear voice and in a very pure French, she began talking to the animal.

"You're free," she said. "You can do just what you like —nobody's watching you. And you can say what you like, too. Come along, doggie...."

I arose and left immediately. I wanted only too badly to talk to this poor old lady, but what purpose would it have served? I would have learned nothing new.

On another occasion, in Herzen Street, I observed a crowd gathering outside an oriental restaurant. I approached discreetly and saw that two militiamen were trying to lay hold of a struggling, shouting youth, aged about sixteen. I refrained from asking any questions and contented myself with listening to the remarks of the bystanders. Apparently, the boy was

required by the labour authorities to spend two years in a mining-school and thereafter to be directed as provided by law. He was the picture of despair: having, without success, called upon the surrounding people to come to his assistance, he was now violently insulting them. The militiamen were well trained and succeeded in gaining control of their victim without recourse to brutality. Then, as if from nowhere, ten other policemen loomed up to assist their colleagues, who were now attempting to lead the young man away to the police-station. This spontaneous generation, in the form of ten policemen, produced an equivalent spontaneous dispersal on the part of the crowd! I crossed to the other side of the road in company with an old lady who, rather incautiously, called upon me to witness the evil of a law which had the effect of delivering the youth of the nation into forced labour.

“They’re getting hold of them everywhere, these poor lads—every day they take them away in droves. And what’s going to become of them?”

Here I had come very close to the general reticence which prevailed upon the subject of those vaunted “labour reserves” which each year drained away hundreds of thousands of young men and women. This was a new aspect of wartime conscription (whether the war was hot or cold); everybody was now a soldier, whether in the front line or in a factory. Our twentieth century was a gloomy one indeed.

The effect of this reticent mentality, which extended to nearly all matters, was that the average Soviet citizen took great care not to give the authorities any ground for complaint; he would, however, seize every available opportunity—provided that he himself ran no risk in doing so—to fool those authorities. One example, drawn from many others, will serve to illustrate this; it occurred on a trolley-bus.

Trolley-buses were the very last word in travelling refinement; the administration did its utmost—and successfully—to see that they were kept in good condition. Passengers entered

by one door and alighted by another, the only persons entitled to enter by the exit door being the crippled, the disabled and also pregnant women. When my trolley-bus stopped, the exits and the entrances were accomplished as usual until the bus was packed quite full, with standing passengers jammed close against each other. However, just as the exit door was about to close, along came a disabled man. Rather agitated, he tried to climb on. The conductor pointed out that no place was available, but the other nevertheless continued his attempts to mount. The conductor, still calm, then tried to dissuade him—complete silence from the passengers in the bus—but when the disabled man continued to argue, gave up and closed the door. The trolley-bus moved off, whereupon the disabled man picked up a large stone, threw it, and smashed one of the windows to pieces.

This was a serious matter. Mere words, so long as they were unpolitical, committed no one; but damage to property was something akin to sabotage.

The bus-door opened. The conductor got down, laid hold of the trouble-maker and forced him into the bus, announcing publicly that the culprit would be handed over to the police at the next stop. The man protested and, in his efforts to escape, struggled and succeeded in knocking the conductor over; whereupon the latter, seeing that patience was no longer of avail and that the time had come for action, retaliated vigorously. The trolley-bus then departed with the now silent disabled man aboard. At the stop in question a policeman was called over and nearly all the passengers got off the bus. The policeman listened to the explanations of the conductor, whose tale was supported by the incriminating broken window, while all the time the stone-thrower loudly protested that he had been a victim of assault. Unmoved, the policeman turned to such passengers as still remained on the scene.

“Who saw it happen?”

No reply. The policeman, calmer than ever, turned to one of the crowd.

"How did this argument start?"

"I couldn't say. I just wasn't noticing at the time."

Having elicited two further replies of a similar nature the police officer left, resignedly, with the offender, casting a disgusted glance at the broken window as he did so.

After he had gone, a woman, confident of the general, if silent, approval of the other passengers, expressed herself in these terms: "Well, we couldn't have told that policeman just what we did see. It would only have meant a harder sentence for that poor fellow. You couldn't help feeling sorry for him. It was better to keep quiet."

These last words told much. A policy of silence was accepted—a silence which, in its wider implication, amounted to a form of pity, since it tended to conceal from the authorities acts which they considered to be criminal. See nothing: know nothing: never act as witness: keep clear at all costs. It was the type of code which high-school children maintain with regard to tale-bearing.

There were, unfortunately, other incidents which came as a painful shock to me, but which were, nevertheless, instructive. I was strolling along the Moskva below the Crimea bridge. At this point the embankment is lined with some broken-down old shacks and, tucked away amongst these, I saw a courtyard and a crowd of boys who had just been released from their school or youth-club. On the embankment itself a band of men (probably belonging to an auxiliary army association) were practising drill under the command of an officer, assisted by some N.C.O.s. Some of the boys began to get interested (as boys will, when any marching is being done), and followed the movements of the squad, but in doing so managed to get terribly in the way of the marching legs. The officer, quite furious, ordered his N.C.O.s to deal with the lads. They managed to catch two or three and gave them a sound thrashing. One of the escaping urchins—he could have been no more than ten—slipped, fell, and was immediately set upon by these brutes. All this took place beneath

the dispassionate gaze of the officer, the recruits and the passing public—the last soon making themselves scarce. I was moved to indignation and no less so by another incident.

Again I was near the river (having skirted the walls of the Kremlin, with their red brick glowing with colour above the snow) and was making for a bridge lower down the river—one of those many Moscow bridges which actually begin at some distance from the river-bank itself and here and there span a broad highway. A woman had begun to go under the bridge, walking rather absently along the edge of the pavement. A truck came rumbling and lurching slowly over the frosty surface of the road. It skidded, glanced against the curb, then righted itself; but in so doing it swung round suddenly, so that its rear portion crashed against the woman. She had no time to jump clear, but fell and remained stretched out on the snow. So far there had been nothing unusual about the accident; but when the truck (the driver had probably felt nothing) continued to lurch on its way and the pedestrians, without so much as a glance at the prone figure, continued on their way also, things took on a different complexion. I felt at a loss, for I knew that these folk were kind-hearted enough. I informed a policeman. He dawdled along to the scene of the accident, took a glance, then came out with this remark, appalling in its cynicism: "She won't be able to work any more."

Officially, nobody had grounds to complain about anything, since all political representatives and public court judges, together with their deputies, were chosen by unanimous vote. A rule inherent in the system was that the minority was subject to regulations laid down by the majority. In order to obtain that majority, the people themselves had to be consulted: hence elections. So far, all this would lead one to suppose that England, France or some other country was under discussion; however, during the general elections I perceived certain very obvious peculiarities in the Soviet electoral system which conferred upon it a quite distinct character.

The terms of the Constitution provided that parliamentary representatives should be chosen directly by secret ballot; every citizen, man or woman, if over eighteen years of age and not imprisoned or mentally defective, had the right to one vote. A later and comparatively brief clause specified that candidates were to be chosen from electoral wards in which their nomination was assured by the various labour organisations, such as the Communist Party, the trade unions, co-operatives, and youth and cultural organisations. This statement of principle was followed by a long series of directions and explanations as to the procedure to be followed. How, in actual fact, was the election managed—for upon this clause the whole electoral edifice was founded? There were three stages: the choice of candidate, the electoral campaign, and the vote itself.

The procedure governing the nomination of the candidate by the workers' organisations was childishly simple. On a certain day the factory, collective farm or government clerical workers were assembled. Naturally, in the case of Stalin, Molotov, Bulganin or another of the famous Party men the vote was unanimous; but after this flying start it was time to start thinking seriously! A zealous Party member climbed on to the platform and proposed Comrade N . . . —perhaps a worker, an engineer, a general or a police official—who had done this, that or the other thing.

“Those against, raise a hand!”

The assembly remained silent, impassive.

“Those for, raise a hand!”

Well, if one was not against, then naturally one must be for . . . ! The necessary hands were raised: the candidate adopted.

During the electoral campaign the “activity centres” got to work on the voters, recounting the varied achievements of their chosen candidate. The electors, who were very fond of flowery speeches, willingly attended such meetings, although they bored me to tears.

The newspapers now announced that Party and non-Party candidates would form a single list, whereupon the usual posters began to appear: "Everybody vote!" "Vote for the Party and non-Party Block!" etc. Since the Constitution permitted freedom of speech only for the consolidation of the Socialist order, the possibility of any discordant, dissenting voice in this hymn of praise was quite ruled out.

The electoral commissions finally closed the district electoral lists. Prior to this, Stalin, Molotov and other well-known Comrades wrote to the Party Executive, informing them that their candidatures had been generally proposed and asking where they should present themselves for election. Back came the stern reply of the Executive: "Andreyev was to proceed to Ashkhabad, Kaganovich to Tashkent and Stalin to Moscow. . . ." Firm discipline, indeed! I confess that my reaction to reading the published texts of these letters in the papers, together with the replies, was one of utter amazement.

Finally came the vote itself. This was compulsory, the house-committees seeing to it that every tenant fulfilled his electoral duty. The citizens of Moscow put on their best clothes and made their way to the polling-station through a beflagged city which for several days had been adorned with the portraits of well-known men, from Marx to Shvernik. The ballot was secret, but the next day I saw in the papers pictures of enlightened voters who declared that they had chosen the "single list." These good people had no means by which they could reverse their decision; the most they could do was to vote blank.

On election night I joined the accordion-playing throng as it made its way to the illuminations. People were talking about a hundred and one things, but never the elections; the outcome had never been in doubt. It seemed odd that anybody could take seriously a tame little comedy which started with such fuss and noise and turned out to be nothing more than a damp squib!

The candidates had been well chosen. I noted amongst

them the names of the big military leaders and people high up in the M.V.D. and M.G.B. (Secret Police). Since they wished to hold their positions, they would doubtless approve to a man any measures proposed. In any case, they convened for no more than a week or so each year!

The whole procedure astonished me and, despite my habitual caution, I ventured to say as much to a number of intelligent-seeming Russians. One of these, to whom I had commented upon the lack of freedom permitted in the "choice" of a candidate, finally admitted that some pressure was brought to bear upon the elector in favour of the official candidates, but that "the Party knew what it was doing . . ." It was as I thought!

Another was more quaint.

"If the masses are not told for whom they should vote, they will naturally vote for Comrade Stalin. Comrade Stalin cannot, single-handed, perform all the duties of the representatives and so . . ."

. . . and so this man was conforming perfectly to the behaviour of the majority of Soviet citizens, who willingly acted on the advice "Don't try to understand!" and meekly followed leaders who spared them the trouble of thinking for themselves.

The longer I stayed in the Soviet Union the more clearly did I see the broad and very simple pattern of the Soviet world and of daily life as lived in that world.

What did it amount to? With one hand the régime cared for the people and handed out free education, free hospital treatment and decorations: simultaneously, the other hand put them to work, chastised them, forced ideas and a manner of life upon them and generally treated them as so many soulless bodies. It was like a boxing match: a well-trained fighter was launched into a savage fight; at the end of each round he had his wounds dressed, was tidied up and then sent in to fight again. This continued until exhaustion point was reached.

The promotor was easy enough in his own mind: the only thing he had to worry about was the amount of the "take" at the end of the bout. When his boy's fighting days were over, he merely found another protégé and left the first to shuffle along as best he could.

I could well understand why these people were a prey to fears which paralysed them and forced them to dissemble. However well-established a job might appear, it was always liable to fall through and even the humblest citizen was a potential candidate for arrest. The Russian lived in constant fear: if he occupied an important position, it was always possible for him to deviate in some way from the Party line; if more lowly placed he could still blunder—say something rash, perhaps, or infringe one of the many involved regulations with which the whole country was swamped. Such infringements had a way of mounting up very quickly!

Could one blame them? It was not even necessary to go so far back as the big trials of 1936–38, although these still seared deep in their memory. What were they to make of the silence which had suddenly enshrouded Voznesensky, one of the regime's leading lights and the organiser of the great wartime economic plans; or of the humiliations to which great composers, such as Shostakovich and Prokofiev, or film-producers, such as Eisenstein, had been submitted? These, and so many more, in the name of "self-criticism" and in order to retain their posts, had been forced to make a public denial of their thoughts, ideas and entire attitude.

Since the Party line itself might change, how could one be sure that an attitude was correct? The philologist, Marr, for example—an authority on Soviet linguistics—used to be considered as something of an oracle; however, long after he was dead, the press introduced a semblance of a debate upon his linguistic position, following upon which he was condemned by Stalin personally. The plaque bearing Marr's name was removed from the Institute of Linguistics and both he and his teaching were renounced.

These are only instances of fears which beset intellectual circles and which did not necessarily affect the material world of everyday life; but when people just vanished, to be heard of no more, was not a real physical fear excusable enough? For example, I learned of a naval officer who had been first stationed in Moscow and then sent to the Arctic. When he arrived there, he was told that a charge of seditious talk had been levelled against him because he had spoken in favour of "the American way of life" (which, in any case, he could have known only by hearsay). He was able to inform his relatives before he left, but since that time nothing had been heard of him. His family made repeated inquiries and were finally told that he was "in good health." But where was he enjoying this "good health"?

An old lady serving on my household staff disappeared; a devoutly Christian young man, who made no secret of his feelings, was mysteriously arrested; another, who was summoned to the police-station, never returned. Why, in heaven's name?

Was it not enough to make anybody shudder to see passing truckloads of convict labour-gangs under their M.V.D. guards or a grille-topped prison van with its central aisle filled with crouching prisoners, flanked by their M.V.D. warders; or to read in the newspapers that a certain citizen had been "deprived of liberty" for five years because of some mild offence—or even, in more serious cases, condemned to ten or fifteen years' "corrective labour"? I had seen some of these forced labour camps and work-yards lining the railways, but had noticed others in the town and countryside also; their inmates seemed well enough, but there were always the guards and that barbed wire. . . .

The death penalty was abolished on 26th May, 1947, when it was anticipated that victory would lead to a long period of peace and a strengthening of the régime. It was re-introduced on 12th January, 1950, by "popular demand" (that, surely, was a little hard to swallow!), in order to combat traitors,

saboteurs and enemies of the régime. Whom had they in mind?

Small wonder that people saw, said and knew nothing! I was to remember that scene in the trolley-bus on many occasions. A friend once explained, "You see, to be a witness in a law-case means involving both yourself and another person in misfortune. If the evidence of your eyes has been responsible for condemning another, then those offending members deserve to be torn out!" Fear and solidarity: if you want to live happy, live hidden!

Fear, both physical and intellectual, extended to all walks of life. A poignant example occurred when I was buying a second-hand book which dated back several years. Before releasing it to me, the bookseller proceeded to what he termed "an operation": this consisted of cutting out and burning a preface, written by some person who had since become "suspect." I fear that all too many operations of this kind were being performed!

Life in the Soviet Union was made up of such acts of self-preservation—reflexes which were quickened by a latent fear, together with all the complexes which attend such a state. The people there certainly made up their share of suffering humanity.

In a materialistically based system which held that the spirit proceeds from matter, a physical ailment received greater attention than a moral one, and in this field the Soviet medical service seemed to me quite efficient. The State needed workers and displayed an equal solicitude for their physical welfare as for that of its armed forces; in much the same way it cared for their intellectual (i.e. political) health. This care began with pre-natal consultations and child-welfare and was followed up by medical inspections in the schools, training colleges and universities. Medical attention was free; when sick, the rural, urban or intellectual worker had only to visit the doctor and obtain treatment. If necessary, he was given

sick leave: the doctor or head of the hospital wrote out a note for the employer, sanctioning the sick man's absence, and he was eventually able to return to work as usual, having received during his first fifteen days' absence no reduction in salary. Thus, I found myself repeatedly obliged to grant a month's leave to my major-domo, when one of his great drinking bouts had brought on an attack of liver!

Whatever his occupation, the worker was entitled to rest or convalescence in one of the sanatoriums or health resorts in the Union, such as those in the Crimea, the Caucasus or in the neighbourhood of Odessa.

Although this was not a right, some organisations had even established the custom of granting their personnel a month's rest at one of the spas, in addition to their three weeks' annual holiday. To my own household staff I gave a month's holiday, but from Easter onwards I used to hear little suggestions about further leave: the housemaid was in the habit of going regularly to the Crimea; the woman who did the heavy work and her husband (the boiler man) to the Ukraine. . . .

I had occasion to visit some of the hospitals. In principle we had no cause to deal with them since, as foreigners, we had at our disposal a very well-equipped clinic. The doctor in charge of us (and when we wanted him he had to be sent for by car) was a renowned professor. He gave evidence of the greatest devotion to his patient and surrounded himself with every conceivable safeguard: analyses, X-ray photographs, blood-tests, injections, sulfa drugs—all the resources of medical science—while the clinic opened a medical case-history for the patient. When an operation or isolation became necessary, the clinic was unable to deal with the case, which had then to be referred to one of the hospitals. A number of Embassy employees had been to hospital in this way.

The buildings I saw shared the rather sinister atmosphere of hospitals throughout the world; an atmosphere due not so much to the white smock and close-fitting cap which visitors were obliged to don, as to the depressing appearance of the

whole lay-out. One crowded day, owing to lack of space and time, it became necessary to wheel down the corridor two corpses, each draped in a too brief shroud from beneath which the stiffened feet protruded. My fellow-visitors and the patients themselves seemed supremely unaffected by the near passage of these dead bodies and I was probably the only one to feel any astonishment. There were no private rooms. The general wards were clean, the service being augmented by convalescents whom the hospital authorities retained for a few extra days in return for a small wage; but it was hardly pleasant to see all these people displaying their wretched condition and crowding so promiscuously in one room.

Despite the fact that freedom of religious practice had been solemnly proclaimed, the appearance of a priest was a real nightmare for the head of a hospital. I could well conceive the utter despair of an old French lady who, in spite of her expressed wishes—her last-minute pleadings—was forced to die alone, without the succour of the Catholic priest for whom she had asked.

Hospitals, those museums in which the physical frailties of man are on display, are sad enough in any country; but in the Soviet Union the impress of materialism rendered them yet more frightening. For there suffering was reduced to a matter of scalpel and potion, and death itself had become merely an item reportable for statistical purposes.

Human behaviour is also prompted by pride, and this in turn leads to ambition. Everybody wanted a good position, not only for the position itself but also for the respect it commanded. The key to all the best posts in the Soviet Union lay in self-instruction, for this not only raised one's status in the eyes of other people but took the place of natural development, education and experience—all qualities which helped one on in life.

Life had to be based upon scientific culture (the word "science" being used here in its widest sense) for it was upon science that the materialistic structure of socialism was founded.

The State undertook to direct the mind and offered the people cultural facilities; the average citizen, rejoicing in the pride of his hard-won knowledge, recognised this educative role with gratitude. Everybody, rich or poor, worker or peasant, could follow a course of studies and pursue these to the very limit of his capacity; there was nothing to stop his gaining the highest diplomas, unless he was prevented from doing so by ill-health or—unthinkable contingencies!—by flagrant deviation or ideas of too individualistic a nature. Education was compulsory and free, the many educational establishments including primary schools (seven years) and also secondary schools, at the completion of which the student could obtain a certificate which roughly corresponded to matriculation. In addition to this basic education, there were also technical and trade-schools for specialised study while, at still more advanced levels, came the University and schools for highly specialised branches of knowledge.

Thus far, the educational pattern seemed normal enough. The unusual feature lay in the dual character of these studies: they carried with them not only intensive technical specialisation, but an equally intensive ideological training through the teaching of Marx-Leninism and the interpretation of both past and present history in the light of that doctrine. Ideology was the cement which bound the Soviet people together, while specialisation was the water-tight compartment which obliged them to remain and perfect themselves in a certain narrow field of work. Ideology belonged to the world of ideas, which at times seemed remote: specialisation affected one's everyday life and was ever-present.

The Soviet schoolchild was not bothered by such matters; he worked for his exams in much the same way as any other child, except that in the Union he was singled out for special favour. The régime, itself young, gave the youth of the country every preference and encouragement and, by so doing, considered itself entitled to mould them after its own fashion.

A teacher whom I met whilst visiting a children's play-park explained this to me quite frankly. "In bourgeois and capitalist countries you teach the child to say 'Yes, Mummy!' or 'Yes, Daddy!'; here we teach him to obey in terms of communal life, for the benefit of socialist society."

Unfortunately, numerous exceptions could be found which provided that sharp contrast inherent in all things Soviet and reduced the overall standard to something like a good, honest average.

I thought of those teen-age boys who attended the trade-schools. I had often seen these lads near our Embassy as they walked in ranks to their work or canteen, floundering along in the snow with dull eyes. (They reminded me of the Public Assistance orphans in Paris who, despite their comfortable uniforms, used to fill me with such pity.) Their school was situated in a badly-neglected house on the far side of a courtyard which was littered with refuse and old packing-cases. They learned how to use a hammer, a chisel, or some other implement, and then, upon leaving the school, were at the service of the State and faced with the prospect of being sent to the Ukraine, the Komi, Tadzhikstan, or wherever their skill was needed. They had no choice in the matter, but were victims offered to the holocaust of the Plan and the greater glory of the socialist citadel—to a dry and chilly abstraction.

Thus the State fostered education amongst its citizens, putting them into uniform, forming their ranks to its own pattern, disciplining them and directing their minds along a fixed course, whilst at the same time confining their individual material activities to narrowly specialist channels.

Since the Soviet citizen did not remain at school and subject to school discipline all his life, the régime sought to spread popular culture by means of public lectures. Those at the Polytechnic Institute were the most popular and since they often dealt with foreign policy, I took the opportunity of attending several.

It was all so involved and long-winded: the same old arguments, the same method of interpreting facts in the light of Marx-Leninist doctrine—and all wallowing in an indescribable intellectual muddle. Theoretically an order of reasoning was employed: the subject was traced from its origins; an account given of its historical development up to the present day; and finally a Marx-Leninist interpretation of the findings advanced before arriving at the inevitable conclusions.

It was a wonderful programme, but seldom realised. From the very beginning the speaker or author lost his way amongst incidentals, repetitions and reflections which had nothing to do with the subject. He was moved to heavy sarcasm, indignant protests, cries of victory. I lost track completely and kept wondering when he was going to come to the point; but somehow he never quite did. It was enough to make anyone despair!

This procedure, it must be admitted, had some value for people unacquainted with the methods of Aristotle and Descartes, for these were more suited to independent minds and individualisms of a pronounced character. In France and the Latin countries everybody had his personal opinion which, if he so chose, he could incorporate into the more general flow of ideas. The people of those lands shared a lively genius which stood ready to serve noble and freedom-loving minds. True, when abused (as it often was) it tended to be over-critical, obstructionist, arrogant, anarchistic and prone to calumny. The power of reasoning, however, remained at the service of the individual intelligence.

In the Soviet Union, on the contrary, the jumble of statements, repetitions and incidentals had the effect of creating a collective environment; the listener was caught up, held and immobilised by the net of Marx-Leninist argument, the myriad strands of which seemed to descend upon him at every point. The average cultural level of the Soviet citizen fell so far below that of his Latin counterpart that it was hard to see how, unless he was naturally gifted that way, he could hope to form any

criticism, especially as it was impossible for him to know upon what to base this. The audience listened open-mouthed to the long, involved speeches and their brains stuck fast in the intellectual glue. This collective environment tended to produce in the public a uniformity of impressions—a condition which made it possible to impose a thought, a word of command and ultimately an action which would be carried out unhesitatingly. A method of presentation—or “argument”—such as this had the effect of producing in the listeners a state of hypnosis and, under such an influence, there seemed no limit to what they might be impelled to do. It was a method well suited to a still-malleable people. In the Soviet Union reasoning was no longer at the command of the individual's personal intelligence; rather, it was the individual who served, who yielded to dictated reasoning, submerged himself in the environment created for him and agreed to renounce his own personality.

To achieve such a result it was necessary for this process to be directed on the higher level by exceptionally intelligent men—by psychologists, gifted with such an adaptability of mind that they were able to cope with a variety of circumstances and audiences; by men who perceived realities and clove to them. That such men had been found, I felt quite convinced.

The members of the audience, when not asleep, seemed attentive enough, as if they were listening to an explanatory talk before a concert, or perhaps watching a film, parade or firework-display. After the lecture the speaker allowed a short pause to elapse and then asked for questions. Questioners wrote these out on loose sheets of paper (which they took good care not to sign) and had them sent up to the speaker. The system ensured virtual anonymity and hence a reasonable measure of sincerity and variety in the questions themselves.

The queries reflected only rarely the impression made by the lecture itself; on the other hand, they revealed the inner concerns of a people apprehensive about the future. Amongst

those which recurred most frequently I noted: "Will there be a war?"; "Will our military strength be sufficient to deter the Western imperialists from attacking us?"; and "What support can we count on from Communists abroad?"

Foreign politics was not the only subject dealt with in these lectures. I noted also the Soviet Cinema (the greatest in the world), Soviet Sport (the greatest in the world) and current Soviet events and achievements, such as the great construction projects, the proposed transformation of the steppes by means of plantation and irrigation, the theories of Michurin, town-planning, etc.

Despite the effusions of certain clumsy and childish zealots, this concern for popular culture, backed up as it was by propaganda, was not to be regarded lightly; indeed, I came to admire both the lecturers who tried sincerely to educate the people and the masses themselves in their hunger for knowledge and education and their efforts to follow what was being said. Whatever opinion one might have of the results, the people left feeling that they had learned something and that, if they only took the trouble, they could come to know still more. Their knowledge was often elementary, the ideas gained badly assimilated, but this hardly mattered. They were filled with a great pride.

Personal pride such as this quickly and quite normally became converted into national pride and hence—since the Russian Slav element predominated in the population—into Russian pride. At this point, aided by propaganda, it degenerated into an extreme arrogance.

The Soviet people could not help observing that Russian was the official language; that the highest posts in all the Federal Republics of the Union were occupied by Russian officials; that army uniforms and badges of rank were to all intents and purposes those of "old" Russia; and that it was the military glories of the old Russian Empire which were still celebrated, on the grounds that, as a great leader had once said, "we must take from the past whatever we find good and

adapt it to the present." The Soviet people were indeed everywhere, which was as good as saying "the Russians were everywhere." This fact was brought home to me in an unexpected fashion and the discovery acted as a kind of catalyst, bringing about a very simple combination of two separate elements.

I was returning from Sweden and had taken the train at Helsinki for my journey on to Leningrad and Moscow. We stopped at Viborg. Provided that he came to some arrangement with the conductor, the traveller could here wander round the town for an hour or two pending the train's departure, tasting the forbidden fruit of a forbidden zone. Viborg had formerly been the flourishing and cheerful Finnish town of Vipuri, but had been severely damaged by the war and was at that time being completely reconstructed. There was one peculiarity about the place, however: Finnish was no longer spoken there. The passers-by were Russian; the tradesmen were Russian; the officials were Russian. The Karelian population had either fled at the moment of invasion or been dispatched elsewhere.

I established an immediate mental connection between this town and Königsberg, for the circumstances were similar: there also the name had been changed, the home of Kant having now become Kaliningrad; no German was spoken there now—only Russian. This progressive "degermanisation" had struck me during the stages of my air journey from Berlin.

Here were two tangible cases. They suggested that there was at least the possibility of truth in the rumour that the Baltic populations of Latvia and Estonia had been forced to leave their own countries and had been sent to the East. It seemed, then, that in areas where plain superimposition was not considered adequate, there remained the alternative of eliminating the native populations and replacing them with Russian stock. Well might one say "The Russians are everywhere!"

In my capacity as walker I was able to observe that the streets were gradually improving in appearance. Everywhere large buildings were being constructed and on the Sadovaya, the long arterial road which encircled Moscow, some containing twenty or more stories were slowly rising. These great blocks of construction gave a more varied look to the city. However, despite this reconstruction effort, the housing problem seemed far from being solved. The new houses were not solidly built and the old ones crumbled away even as the fresh living accommodation was created. Nevertheless, it was a beginning; modest enough, perhaps, but at least the approach to a solution.

I had occasion to visit a fairly highly placed person who was living in a new building on an avenue leading out of Moscow. The arrangements were adequate: three good rooms for three people—real luxury. There was a magnificent view, a grocery on the ground-floor, a lift and a telephone. I had a look around the place; there were no cupboards, shelves or wardrobes; here and there the kitchen tiling was falling out and the bathroom plumbing was in need of repair. Such details appeared to be of minor importance to the owner and he found his home comfortable enough. I was made warmly welcome. We talked of nothing but music and Soviet literature and found that in this field of culture we had many things in common.

As I descended the stairs after my visit I noticed from the cards which were pinned to the various doors that this building was tenanted by the higher-ups of the régime—a director, a professor, generals, etc. Such places were not intended for the proletariat, whose dictatorship did not extend to the matter of housing. The authorities made much of the fact that the poorer people paid a very low rent, which was true enough; rent paid was in proportion to income earned, so that if one earned less one naturally paid less! The law even provided for a reduced rent in the case of basement-dwellers; but, after all, these places were little better than cellars.

Nevertheless, although the housing left much to be desired, the standard of living rose steadily during my stay, and particularly after 1949. This was most clearly evident in the case of food and clothing; less so for other commodities. Prices were lower, there was a greater selection of goods and a relative abundance of basic necessities. Quantity there certainly was, but quality and finish? . . . It would be pointless to bring up the question of lack of plugs in the wash basins—that was a general feature!—but what about those unmatched socks, the jagged combs, the unshuttable suitcases, the temperamental tubes of dentifrice?

Evidence of the improved standards of living was most apparent in the changed look of the people one met on the street. They were better dressed—although with as little elegance as before—and possessed a greater composure. The streets also seemed changed—more inviting: the shop-fronts and window-displays showed a greater variety and there was an attempt to attract customers; here and there some trees had been hastily planted. There were new trolley-buses; a spate of taxis very soon appeared to replace the shocking wrecks which had hitherto pretended to that name, but which in reality had been no more than light motor-lorries with open tops, set routes, and more properly resembling small and inferior buses.

Without doubt the most tangible proof of this amelioration was the opening of a new clothing store and also a fashion exhibition. The long article which announced this event stressed the new advance made by the Soviet textile industry. The labours of reconstruction and the restoration of the country after a severe war had for long absorbed all energies, with the result that the matter of personal appearance had been utterly neglected; but could women be found—even Soviet women—who were prepared to renounce all interest in dress, particularly when their wealthier, more privileged sisters in the régime sought to distinguish themselves from those less fortunate; when Paris fashion-journals fell into their hands, or

they caught a glimpse of the dresses worn by the wives of Western diplomats? The feminine consciousness which was slowly developing under improved conditions was probably a source of concern to a régime which, since it could not servilely follow the dictates of French fashion, was obliged to innovate and, from nothing, to create its own Soviet style. This task had been eased by the subjection of Poland and Czechoslovakia, countries whose linen and other products had been appearing on the market since 1949, for this enabled Soviet industry to turn its attentions to the question of dress.

I warmly approved the trend. Societies could be transformed and refined by women. Their influence was at all times important and often decisive.

The approach to everything was so serious. Despite their rare moments of abandon in the countryside or restaurant, the people seemed to me to be in a state of continual tension, and I found myself longing for a touch of humour; humour of that all too rare kind which springs from an ability to laugh at oneself.

One evening, during the early days of my stay, I was visiting a Western colleague of mine in the company of some other attachés and also two Soviet officers. Our host, in an effort to entertain his guests, had organised a game which consisted of following a thread of cotton around the apartment and negotiating the various obstacles lying in its path. One of these obstacles involved crawling under a table—a process which inevitably tends to rob gentlemen in evening dress of their official dignity. The Soviet officers refused the hazard and very stiffly took their leave. It was a distressing incident.

I was particularly encouraged to search for traces of humour in view of the amusing stories which went around Moscow, for these betokened a keen wit. When I learned that a certain cabaret-singer (famous before the Revolution) was appearing in Moscow, I went to see his performance. An old and very distinguished-looking gentleman came on, raised his arms and

began to sing a kind of hymn to the glory of the Leader. This was not quite what I had been looking for!

There remained the Puppet Theatre, one of the most original Moscow productions. Marionettes and shadow-theatres exist everywhere in the world, but rarely do they achieve an art and perfection to compare with those of Moscow. So well studied and reproduced were the movements of the bodies, limbs and faces, that these creatures of wood and cloth seemed to become truly alive: in a performance of Kipling's *Mowgli* a panther stretched itself like the real animal, while the peasants in Gogol's *Christmas Night* possessed an astonishing flexibility and life. The theatre director was a man who loved his puppets independently of all politics. They once put on a production called *An Unusual Concert*. This turned out to be a satire on singers, choirs and musicians. It was wonderful: in one scene, where a vocal ensemble sang *The Metro*, the movements of the arms and legs were particularly well co-ordinated, the eyes of the singers all revolved at a word of command, the mouths opened simultaneously, the tremolo voices were exaggerated and the basses could hardly have been more bass! The lifelike impression had vanished: the choristers, now mechanisms, managed to convey a wonderful effect of caricature. The theme was amusing: the Metro, the luxurious Moscow Metro, the most wonderful Metro in the world—where you could be crammed, jammed and shoved about—have your buttons torn off and be carried miles beyond your destination. . . .

This seemed innocuous enough: but since all singers, choirs and musicians were officials under the direct control of the Ministry of Culture, a satire upon them represented a satire upon the Ministry, which meant the State, which meant the Party, which meant . . . and so on. As for lampooning the Metro . . .!

The programme was promptly changed and nothing more was heard of *An Unusual Concert*.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### The New Social Strata

THE post-Revolutionary development of Soviet society could not escape the fundamental laws of society in general and followed a pattern set by politics and the rule of work. Work was a basic principle laid down by the Constitution; it was regarded as an obligation and debt of honour and was best described in the following alimentary terms: "If you don't work, you don't eat!"

In order to encourage the workers, the government distributed wholesale the title "Hero of Soviet Labour", but for a great number of Soviet workers the prospect of receiving such a medal was not the only incentive to effort. In the Soviet Union there existed a cult of work which was so fostered by the Party that in general the workers ended up by becoming interested in their jobs and gave of their best. The quality of their output might vary a good deal, but the effort was there; the organisation of the work was not brilliant and there were slackers, but it was up to the employer to find a way of directing these more successfully.

The State did all it could to abolish unemployment and in this apparently succeeded. In reality, however, although there were no unemployed, there were workers who functioned at a reduced pace and who were paid accordingly. The Government paid no unemployment benefit, but rewarded with lower wages people who did practically nothing; for one could hardly rate as work the duties of that beautifully uniformed young girl in the Metro who stood watching people on the escalator and whom the supervisor telephoned from

time to time to check that she was still at her post. There was, however, a difference, and one which told in favour of the Soviet system: these all but unemployed people at least felt that they were in some way part of an organisation and could retain the hope of better things; they were not just left to drift in pure and simple idleness. In moral and social terms this represented a great deal, even if the remuneration received by such people amounted to no more than a pittance.

Also to the credit of the Soviet Union it must be recorded that, despite the delays and cumbrousness of the bureaucratic machinery, the slipshod and uneconomic working methods, the backwardness of production and the inferior quality of the finished goods, the fruits of labour were shared out in as fair a manner as possible. Where overproduction occurred it did not present the problems which elsewhere have been accounted insoluble; any profit made was placed to the credit of the whole concern. Speculation and those unsavoury devices by which men can make fortunes without having to work were exceedingly rare. That, at least, was a healthy state of affairs.

In principle Soviet society was classless: there were only peasants, manual workers and intellectuals. Despite the abolition of classes, however, there were a number of different grades, envisaged in a principle of the Constitution itself which stated: "From each according to his ability: to each according to his work." This stipulation amounted to official recognition of the varying capacities of men. A more concrete recognition was provided by the salaries themselves, for in this respect the peasants and workers were accorded different treatment. The collective farm worker could always get by somehow; he received produce, a portion of which he could sell, and he was taxed on the basis of an annual return. The case of the worker and the intellectual was less simple; they received a monthly salary, generally not very high, but to which were added certain material advantages, such as medical care, co-operatives and so on. They were liable to various

taxes: personal possessions, single person, extra earnings, local taxes, graduated taxes, and all these apart from the Voluntary Loan—the “Debt of Honour.” Exemptions were frequent, as in the case of workers in the Great North, some pensioners, those living in certain sectors of the Far East, and prospectors for rare and precious metals. They applied also to people favoured by the régime, such as the rural intelligentsia, tractor-station employees, agricultural technicians, doctors, teachers, members of the armed forces, M.V.D. personnel, etc. In addition to this, an attempt was made to ease yet further the living conditions of people such as generals, admirals, field officers, artists and professors who had given over twenty-five years’ service, by making available to them the loan of a good round sum, sufficient for the construction of a house. They were allotted plots of land on permanent lease, to the scale of .75 to 1.25 hectares (approximately 1½ to 3 acres) for general officers, and from .5 to .75 hectares (approximately 1½ to 1¾ acres) for field officers. These gentlemen certainly had no cause to complain!

The wage-spread was very wide, ranging from a monthly wage for the more humble people of three to four hundred roubles and for the big men of up to 15,000 roubles; still more could be paid to certain writers, artists and intellectuals.

“What do you expect?” an engineer explained to me in a train. “We have to re-create our intelligentsia and so we pay those who can help us do it.”

The system was geared to tie in with the national construction projects such as industrialisation and electrification of the country, the Asian projects and the creation of a maritime route across Northern Siberia. The achievements had been considerable. In making such a list I do not seek to discover whether the investments could have been better made and the energy devoted to these enormous labours have been otherwise expended; I am merely stating facts.

To return to our average Moscow inhabitant. In view of the cost of living and despite the various benefits in kind which

he enjoyed, his net salary did not permit him to live extravagantly. His life was undoubtedly a hard one and many Westerners would consider that it represented poverty, misery and a very low standard of existence. From their point of view this would be correct. Taken all round the standard of living of the average Soviet citizen was certainly inferior to that of a Westerner; but did it follow that the Soviet people were unhappy? Nothing could be less certain.

A "standard of living" is not merely a question of food, clothing and housing; account should also be taken of the needs of the average member of the population and of the satisfaction he experiences in a given setting. The needs of the Soviet citizen were not difficult to establish. He was not plagued with a hankering after things which, in the course of time, have become with us crying necessities. His mind did not revolve around the kitchen; he would accept uncomplainingly the pokiest lodging, provided that it was well heated. As for the hats and dresses worn by Western women, the man in the street took these to be the handiwork of creatures either mentally deranged or else downright immodest.

An appreciation of a standard of living must furthermore take into account the original national starting point, which naturally differs widely, according to whether an American, Scandinavian, Frenchman, Sudanese or Eskimo is under consideration. The Soviet Union had a very late start. Round about 1950, for example, gas was installed in certain quarters of Leningrad and Moscow. This was certainly a measure of progress, as the national propaganda pointed out; but by Western standards? . . . I noticed that the hotel staffs had new vacuum-cleaners and seemed quite overwhelmed by them; that in the railway-depot the number of all-metal trucks was on the increase. It was certainly all progress—but by our standards? . . . On the other hand, I could equally well claim to have seen three-dimensional films long before they appeared in the West and television was general. All such matters are relative.

Despite this initial lag, the basic physical needs of the Soviet people were satisfied. Their standards of living differed from ours, but since they had no point of comparison with the outside world, the ordinary citizens did not suffer overmuch from this fact. On the other hand, in common with all nations, they liked to feel that their leaders were strong, powerful and terrible. In this they were fully gratified. They demanded also fine showmanship, pomp, prestige and things miraculous; the government recognised this need and satisfied it admirably with military parades, air displays and physical education shows; with special Days for the Armed Forces, the Railways, the Post Office, and Collective Farms; with posters, lectures, proclamations; with meetings, study-groups, clubs, classes, lecture-halls and museum visits; with exceptional ballet and low-priced seats at the theatre; with the Lenin Museum—that sanctuary of the New Society. . . . The list at times overwhelmed me.

Small wonder that the citizen had no time for independent thought! He was lulled, benumbed and directed; it was convenience itself—the lazy way out by which all men are tempted, but which, in this instance, was exploited in a very subtle manner. The citizen knew that if he fell sick the régime would care for him free of charge; that he could rely upon a well organised and smooth-running paid holiday system; and that the most comprehensive studies were open to any intelligent and industrious child. As a consequence of all this his needs for the time being could be considered as met. He was crammed with words, speeches and promises and loved it; he felt at home penned up in the middle of this great herd—dragooned, indoctrinated and led by a few individuals whom he feared—and he supported the principle of the régime. As several passengers (a young woman, a workman and the son of a shepherd) said to me in the corridor of the Odessa train: “It’s our very own government; it sprang from *us*.”

Shortly after the Revolution, in a Baltic territory which became independent in 1918, I was talking to a young Russian

*émigrée*. She vouchsafed this remark, "My compatriots are by temperament anarchistic; but, when directed, are capable of greater things."

The present government had succeeded in canalising the energies of the Soviet people. What power had been delivered into its hands!

During the course of my long stay, and especially at the outset, I was able to maintain relationships with a number of Soviet people in non-official positions. I retain a vivid memory of these contacts, for they helped to enlighten me concerning the private and unspoken thoughts of the Moscow community.

I came to know a sailor who had formerly served at Kronstadt but who now occupied a fairly good position in the new society and was living quietly with his wife in a two-roomed flat, complete with kitchen. I had never known him to voice any kind of personal comment and his opinions steadfastly echoed those of *Pravda's* editorials.

One snowy winter evening, however, when my wife and I were giving vent to our longings for blue Mediterranean skies and life in France, he touched upon this sense of regret and of things unachieved to which men were at times subject.

"It's a well-known spiritual condition," he said. We call it *toska*.\* How can one explain it? It cannot be understood—it has to be felt. And it contains the essence of all our Russia. . . . *Toska*—it's the longing for something unattainable—an indefinable force which prompts us to act without our knowing exactly why we do so; the desire to attain absolute perfection, mingled with a vague awareness of the imperfection that prevents that attainment. Look at science: it explains everything and one should be satisfied to believe that it will reveal everything. But no, there still remains a gap—an empty space—the question-mark; there you have *toska*! You can't escape. Some people prefer death—that might be

\* Sadness or low spirits mingled with nostalgia; akin to the German *Sehnsucht*.

a solution: if there's nothing beyond, *nitchovo*; and if there is something, well, there you have an extra chance of finding out.

"It is no doubt true that we are, after all, nothing more than an extraordinary nuclear combination of infinitely tiny overlapping solar systems which are constantly chasing and colliding with one another. But if this is true, the emotion aroused in us by a sunset is simply a matter of physical chemistry; the innocent look of a child a variation of frequency; the genius of Beethoven a pure coincidence.

"It is, then, to the arms of a great and terrible emptiness that we are beckoned. Here lies the origin of our *toska*."

He was silent for a moment and then, with a motion of his hand, murmured "*Nitchovo*."

I became acquainted also with a man of fairly advanced age who had travelled in Europe and in former times had known the glories of Imperial Petersburg. He was charming, good-hearted and tolerant. He possessed just a touch of irony and scepticism and was disposed to take an objective view of matters and men and to judge events according to their relative importance. Not at all in the Party line!

The radio had just broadcast a communiqué on the Korean war and reported, without further comment, that the Americans were in headlong retreat. My friend began thinking aloud.

"It's strange: there you have the Americans falling back. Does that imply that they are the weaker side; that they were taken by surprise; or that their organisation is faulty? Yet look at the way they held on in Berlin with their air-lift! Apparently they haven't been defeated yet—well and truly defeated, that is, and setting off back to their own country. Leaving this aside for a moment, consider what has happened since 1939: every army—even the most renowned—has been overcome and routed upon one occasion or other—the French, the British and the Italians. Ourselves . . .? Don't forget that our territories also were invaded, hundreds and thousands of Russians taken prisoner and that many of our people

extended a warm welcome to the Germans. Yet, for all that, Germany was beaten in the end. And now it's the turn of the Americans. Every general in the world has had his black day, but this has in no way reflected dishonour upon the military glory and reputation of the army under his command. That should be a lesson in humility and wisdom. By this time people should have realised that war does not pay: it is no longer—if indeed it ever was—a method of discussion. *Ultima ratio regum*\*—that's a joke in this age of total and atomic war, but are people intelligent enough to realise it? I have my doubts!"

He went on to speak of the general distress caused by the prospect of such a calamity.

"If the others begin it we shall be forced to defend ourselves; especially since they can bring us nothing but ruins to replace our present order. Aggression would not pay them in any case, for the third world war will be the grave of imperialism."†

Recalling some words of Marshal Bulganin, he added that some wars were fought for justice and liberation.

I interrupted gently. "What do you think of the Partisans for Peace movement and of your call for peace to the workers and to men of good will throughout the world?"

"The rest of the world does not believe in our sincerity."

"You think, then, they don't realise that the Soviet people have suffered so greatly that they have no wish for another war? You don't believe that Europe believes the declarations of your leaders when they claim that the great long-term projects in which your country is engaged provide sufficient proof of your will for peace?"

"The West says that we are doing these things to improve our armament potential. Anyway, in a generation's time where will you find the people who have suffered, in this country or in any other? The young people of the future will

\* *Ultima ratio regum*—The final argument of kings, i.e., military force.

† A much quoted saying of Molotov's.

consider themselves smarter than their elders and be quite prepared to spring at each other's throats as they have always done in the past."

"And so . . .?"

"Well, I'll tell you. You'll never improve people, either in this or in any other country. You can't even conceive of a peaceful atmosphere so long as the rulers of the world continue to stir people up or continue to work for the profit motive. You can't build anything on selfishness, and you can't build anything by preaching hate."

The people whom I encountered in the street, the restaurants or in private life and who thus confided their thoughts and opinions formed a good average section of the Soviet population. That community, like any other, had its troubles, ambitions and disappointments; like any other, it was composed of men with virtues and weaknesses who longed to live and work in peace.

Soviet society represented the fruit of a philosophy which claimed to direct the life of the individual. But there was a maggot in the fruit—the neo-bourgeoisie. This had sprung from an inequality present in the very structure of the Socialist State in the making, and proceeded inevitably from the formation of a privileged category, not to say of a class. Such a disparity was due to initial differences in intelligence, one's position in the State organisation, and the evaluation of services rendered. It revealed itself outwardly in matters of dress, the possession of a car, superior living accommodation, a ruthless self-assurance or, quite simply (as in any common bourgeois country), by wealth. There was, however, another side to the question: theoretically, at least, people were not permitted to benefit from a functional inequality. A general was granted considerable facilities and privileges and was expected to use them to maintain a type of life suited to his rank. He dressed well, could eat extravagantly and occupy the best seats at the theatre; but—and make no mistake about it—he might equally

well turn out to be that gentleman in uniform, loaded up with bulky parcels and struggling to get in or out of a shop or the Metro!

This inequality was readily accepted, since everyone—even the most wretched citizens—nursed the secret hope of bettering himself ("So-and-so managed it, so why shouldn't I?"). Many were the cases of workers, peasants and other humble people who, through work, perseverance and with only a modicum of luck, had succeeded in rising to high positions.

It must be borne in mind also that this inequality—again theoretically—was subject to revision and that such privileges as were accorded did not constitute a gift for all time. If somebody high up no longer showed results, or relaxed his vigilance, his fall could well be swift and resounding; he might be relegated to an inferior position, or else just disappear. This was one of the most dread of all the régime's weapons: it was impossible to make personal plans, for nobody was sure what the next day would bring or whether he would manage to remain favourably placed. Nor were officers spared, since they were not considered to own their ranks: once they had offended, on professional, political or any other grounds, they could be brought before a tribunal equipped with full powers to strip or degrade them.

This threat of a sudden fall from power has, until now, weighed heavily upon privileged persons; but will this always be the case? Will the present higher-ups, who are already beginning to constitute a ruling class, continue to tolerate such a menace? Will they not rather set about ensuring the social future of their own children? A colleague of mine once repeated some words he had heard spoken by a general at a reception:

"In the Suvorov and Nakhimov Schools we want only the sons of proven officers and non-commissioned officers. That's where we are going to get our officer-training material. Army and Navy traditions can be handed down only in the same family."

Any march-past of officer-school cadets, whether this was composed of little "Nakhimovs" (under fifteen) or naval and infantry units, served to illustrate his words. They were all very young—sons of fathers who, as young men, had undertaken a revolution and, in their later years, had won a war. These were not lumbering peasants, nor were the faces those one saw daily in the streets; they were an improved type, often distinguishable by fine features, alert glance and a certain ease of bearing.

Here was a foreshadowing of the personal inequality which inevitably resulted from an inequality of function. The seeds of distrust and eventual hatred were already sown; one had only to observe and listen to be made aware of their existence.

Men are no better in the Soviet Union than elsewhere in the world and there are some men who will always envy their neighbours. Sources of envy and bitterness lie deep in every human being. "Classes" may have been abolished by law, but there always remained the unfortunate ones—people of talent whom circumstances had not favoured. Even if his own needs are modest and he himself (theoretically) satisfied, a workman who receives a low wage and finds life difficult will still envy somebody who lives in lavish style. Was it not then natural that a suffering and hard-working people should experience a feeling of rebellion against a neo-bourgeoisie which clearly despised and distrusted them? I heard many remarks which gave evidence of the growing gap—the abyss—which separated this new privileged class from the people.

On one occasion, in a cheap restaurant on the Arbat, I listened to a tipsy diner who was proposing some rather noisy toasts. A waiter told him in plain terms to clear out. An argument ensued and the drunk shouted, "Are you telling me to get out because I haven't got nice white hands like some other people? I'm a worker, I am!"

A woman-chauffeur was telling me some of her troubles. "I earn practically nothing; but look at the generals and

admirals—they just don't know what to do with their money! Life's becoming impossible!"

She complained of the day-to-day injustices: she was angered to see members of this neo-bourgeoisie riding around in cars, to observe their police-protection, their spacious apartments, their lavish (if ugly) style of dress; while all the time the ordinary people suffered and peasant women carried out the manual labour of the city.

She added, "This country has revolted so often in the past, so why not once more? The Revolution has been betrayed. We should have another, for the sake of justice and our rights."

From the other end of the social scale equally unflattering remarks were directed against the ordinary people themselves. Once, in a large hair-dressing establishment, frequented by the diplomatic corps and wealthier Soviet citizens and in which there were no separate sections for men and women, I overheard a conversation between two ladies of the neo-bourgeoisie.

"I was in the country on Sunday. Just imagine, some common people passed quite close to our villa and left a lot of greasy paper lying around. What specimens they are!"

In a dentist's waiting-room somebody had been describing how a peasant, perched up on the roof of a train, had been killed as the train passed through a tunnel. A lady burst out, "It's terribly sad, I know, but, after all, we have nothing in common with these people. They live like animals."

During one of my travels a young engineer was recounting to me some of his personal problems. At one point he protested, "Having children doesn't prove you're cultured! That should be left to the ordinary people."

Is it even necessary to mention remarks as cynical as these when there were so many examples of diplomats and officers—and their wives—who wished their sons also to become diplomats and officers and their daughters to marry men of this status?

This new privileged class was composed mainly of people

who, during the Revolution, the first Five-Year Plans, or the late war, had rendered outstanding service to the régime and the country and, as a result, had been placed in prominent positions. They enjoyed considerable benefits (a high salary, a car and a three- or four-roomed apartment), while their wives indulged in expensive wardrobes and loud conversation. Not one of these people would willingly relinquish his position or advantages, either for himself or his children.

Was there not already evidence of the abuses which inevitably occur when authority is delegated to people who have risen rapidly from obscure social positions to the highest ranks of the social hierarchy? Would people who had not inherited command know how to exert it with discrimination and, remaining unaffected by their change of fortune, continue to merit their new-won privileges? However this might be, they would at all events do their utmost to retain those privileges.

The attitude of such people could offend, however; indeed, their very existence had already created a rift in the unity of the victorious proletariat. Stalin well sensed this danger and proclaimed that the culprits would be brought to account. "These gentlemen," he wrote, "who have rendered services in the past are now becoming arrogant and seem to consider themselves unaffected by the decisions of the Party and Government. They assume hopefully that, by very reason of their past services, the power of the Soviets dare not strike at them; that they are irreplaceable. What is the answer? The reins of government must be taken unhesitatingly out of their hands, regardless of any past services, and their own power reduced. Such measures are necessary to quell the pride of these overbearing bureaucrats—these great lords!"

Nevertheless, in spite of the severe measures taken against them, the "great lords" continued to multiply. Everybody considers himself in some way smarter and more intelligent than his neighbour and the administrative and military chiefs, the police officials, the artists and others wished at all costs to stand apart from the masses.

The neo-bourgeois occupied the very summit of the social scale. At the other end, closer to the main body of workers, were the outcasts of Soviet society: the old folk, the beggars, those who could no longer work and were obstinate enough to go on living—persons whom fate had rejected.

Old, helpless or totally unproductive persons were in fact very few; people didn't live to a ripe old age, for the climate, drink, the food and difficult living conditions tended to make short work of them. Fifty years was a good age. From this point of view little had changed since Gorky, at the end of the first chapter of *Motil*, wrote: "After living thus for about fifty years, the man

A man worked until exhausted; after that the State allowed him an old-age pension which, for life in a city, was ridiculously inadequate. The person was left on his own with no children to assist him, went to swell the throng of wretched beggars who crowded the streets, the Metro, the shops and the church doors. The cathedral courtyard was filled with weedy children and wretches who made a public display of their sores. Here we revealed the various aspects of physical destitution: the drunkard, the "professional" beggar, the young man dilating upon his personal tragedy—and all to the accompaniment ofumbled prayers from an assembly of old crones who called down blessings upon my head for a handful of kopecks. I came to conceive an affection for one bearded old beggar, a political offender who had once been an artist. His white beard and clear eye put me in mind of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. He gave me an account of his life and of the years spent in prison.

"But why were you imprisoned?"

"*Cherchez la femme*" he replied in French. He then proceeded to relate how he had been denounced for some political-sentimental adventure.

Some of these beggars had police records which prevented their obtaining emplment. (Managers were not keen to take on people who were suspect, or who had already under-

gone punishment for political offences.) If sound of wind and limb, these offenders would eventually be commandeered; if definitely unfit for work, they were left to rot. It was a depressing situation and I felt great pity for these creatures who had been condemned by a utilitarian society; for against the blind force of that society they had no defence.

Such a blind force I saw revealed in the break-up of the Moskva one April. Normally the river, with incredible power and unexpectedness, burst through its frozen shell, overturned and chased it, then, growling with anger, proceeded to overflow the low banks. This particular year it was more than usually violent and flooded several sections of the town, sweeping along beds, benches, mattresses and a medley of objects—the entire furnishings of these wretched dwellings. People intent upon salvage and equipped with poles and hooks lined the salient points of the quay or the tip of the island which separated the river from the canal and strove to recover the passing chattels, but with little success. The river swept brutally on.

Between the neo-bourgeoisie and the outcasts there existed a stratum sufficiently wide to contain a variety of personal types. The professional soldiers, for instance, were inclined to be serious-minded and their approach to everything was marked by a great sobriety. For them personal considerations had no place in service relationships; true, they preferred to deal with people whom they knew personally, but it was quite impossible to "fix matters" with them by means of a private conversation.

"What matters to me," said a Soviet negotiator to a colleague of mine, "is not your personal opinion, but the measure you wish to advocate in my presence." In other words, although the discussions themselves might prove of long duration, there was to be no allowance for that personal element of "chat" which, in any other world, seemed almost inseparable from business discussions. I remember in Berlin

going once with a friend to see a Soviet admiral. We took our places around the table and the admiral began proceedings in the following very direct and clam-like way: "Go ahead, I'm listening!"

At the same time, these people were capable of gestures which were not only unexpected but marked by a touching delicacy of feeling. On one occasion I had been involved in negotiations for the transfer to the French Cemetery in Moscow of certain airmen of the Normandie-Niemen Squadron of the French Air Force who had fallen in East Prussia and Birobzhia. It was an established custom for the French colony in Moscow to visit the cemetery on November 11th to pay respects to our dead, whose graves had been grouped around the 1812 monument. One day I noticed with surprise that a new commemorative stone had been put into position and that the graves of these Frenchmen who had fallen beside Soviet soldiers in the common struggle had been crowned with flowers. On a stone cross—clumsily, laboriously and with a kind of timid reticence—the name of a newly reinterred airman had been scratched in Latin characters. When I expressed my appreciation of this discreet gesture, I received the following reply: "We honour our comrades-in-arms."

The Soviet régime had developed out of a past; whatever it thought of that past and however fiercely it might banish certain survivals of an embarrassing nature, it could not escape entirely from it. Already I had heard, on the Red Square, the march of the Emperor's favourite regiment, the Preobrazhensky; the soldiers who now swung along to its rhythm might be Soviet, but they still bore the badges of rank on their shoulders, as in former days. The famous personalities of old Russia were still revered; despite some superficial appearances to the contrary, many old customs remained unaltered, while the familiar sayings of the past also were still in current use.

Alongside these traditions, more solid, material witnesses to

the Imperial Russian past rose up to greet the eye at every point and lent a distinctive character to the large cities and their surroundings. At first sight it seemed odd that, throughout their well-documented publications the Soviet Government should draw attention to such relics, since so frequently they were in a dilapidated condition; it was almost as if the authorities sought to justify themselves by leaning for support upon those who had preceded them.

To visit these old buildings was to draw near to one of the foundations of the new Soviet society, for they marked the point of origin of a spiritual advance which had continued to the present time. Today's society could not free itself from their influence—it would be like trying to disassociate oneself from Athens, Byzantium or Rome. Life's advance could not be halted, but continued, mightier than men and mightier than the governments of men.

Abandoning for a while the Kremlin and the great, un-destroyed churches of Moscow, I turned to the former dwellings of the rich merchants and to localities, such as parks or gardens, which had been noted in former days. Certain of these mansions had been rented to foreign governments who had installed in them legations and embassies. Some, such as our own, were very charming and unusual; some had been absorbed by the Soviet government and converted into clubs, ministries, or placed at the disposal of various organisations. Still others, released to the city as dwelling-places, had deteriorated into mere rubbish-dumps. Nothing could be more depressing than to see, in some unfrequented area, the decaying façades, the wrenched-out gates and railings, the filthy squalor of a courtyard filled with pools of stagnant water—especially when one remembered that in former days the place had known such elegance and splendour.

Over there was the building formerly known as the *Yar*—a restaurant patronized by Muscovite society. Since the Revolution it had suffered many vicissitudes and for a time had been used as an Air Force Club. Running by the river, near to the

Academy of Sciences, was a park which, at one time, had been considered very select, but which now was nearly deserted. In the Kitai-Gorod, near the Red Square, the former homes of the bourgeoisie were in a state of progressive decay; indeed, Pushkin's house, at the corner of Dzerzhinsky Square, only narrowly escaped a similar fate. Fortunately, on the occasion of the hundred and fiftieth birthday of the poet, the municipality decided to restore the structure.

Around Moscow itself a glimpse of the past was provided by palaces which had formerly belonged to the Russian aristocracy, in particular those of the Sheremetievs. They had been converted into museums and this was quite the best thing that could have happened to them, for in this way the precious objects and works of art which they contained ran less risk of winding up in the commission-shops. My visits to them were not unmixed with sadness, for, contrary to the feeling which similar visits would inspire in the West, here one was made to sense the passing of a form of society.

I found the same thing in Leningrad: ancient palaces and buildings which had been more or less abandoned. The suburbs and the countryside which surrounded the city all bore the tragic scars of war, of which the most notable was a complete lack of trees. Bordering the Moscow and Estonia highways there were stretches which contained only scarred trunks, or trees which had been cut away level with the ground itself—mute witnesses to the frightful carnage which this area had endured. Nor were natural resources alone destroyed; the Pushkin chateau and the pavilions of Petrodvorietz were likewise a picture of ruin.

Pushkin was forbidding in appearance. I visited it for the first time in winter, accompanied by my wife. We trudged up the park slopes ankle-deep in snow, our eyes intent upon our feet and the ground immediately ahead of us. Suddenly we came upon an open space. Before us walls—plain walls pierced by glassless windows—rose up in silent accusation. As she gazed upon them the young Intourist guide had tears in

her eyes; she was silent and we respected that silence. Quickly, however, she mastered herself, smiled faintly, and then resumed her professional duties. She explained how a portion of the furnishings had been recovered and then, feeling unable to limit herself to such a bald statement, continued:

“On the way here you noticed the ruins of the Pulkovo Observatory; they represented Science. Here, at Pushkin, are the remains of a chateau; they represent Art. They attacked all our treasures—but we'll get everything into proper shape again.”

Petrodvoretz was less grim. The chateau was very badly damaged, but my guide (the same as at Pushkin) was pleased to be able to take me into a restored park.

“This is our Versailles. Like you, we also have our big fountains.” (She insisted upon showing me these, and they did, indeed, remind one of Versailles.)

The park was enormous and extended between the chateau building and the sea. Some of the pavilions, which were dotted about amongst the trees, bore French names. The one called *Sans-Souci* transported me instantly to the eighteenth century.

With the memory of these phantoms pursuing me and with that feeling of emotion which is associated with all bygone things, I left these chateaux and palaces and returned once more to the life of the Soviet Union—a life which had sprung from the powerful and abundant earth of Russia. Soviet society, which by reason of its very youth, inevitably turned to the future, partook of this life and was unconsciously influenced by a heritage which it dared not—could not—repudiate.

Amongst the survivals of the past which could not be resisted successfully, a large place must be given to private social gatherings, or what we are accustomed to term social “obligations.” The Soviet people loved to give receptions but, as a foreigner, I and others of my kind were barred from attending, since our presence would have immediately lent a semi-official character to the proceedings.

Nevertheless, the social exchanges between us and the Russians were frequent enough. A large number of Soviet officials were invited to every reception held at a foreign embassy. It became quite a little game to compare the number of acceptances with the number of invitations issued, for according to the percentage turned down, some people managed to arrive at political conclusions which, to say the very least, were hasty. The Soviet guests at these gatherings were always the same—officials and officers (in uniform and without their wives). They were always “on duty.” Seldom did they relax; never did they appear to be enjoying themselves; and they usually left fairly early.

There were, of course, exceptions; I remember giving a most pleasant and strictly Franco-Soviet dinner to some officers at my house, and the occasion brought back again, even if remotely, the atmosphere of the old Berlin days. At another evening gathering my Soviet guests proved to be very natural and full of verve; the “naval” atmosphere helped here. We saw many more Russians at receptions given by the “non-Western” (and in particular the Polish) embassies. Here they seemed to feel more at home.

All this, however, was not the same thing as social life of a purely Soviet character. In Moscow I had an opportunity of attending at least two official receptions of a fairly restricted nature, which were very splendid affairs indeed. One, given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was attended by the senior staff of the diplomatic corps, including military attachés; the other, given by the Army Chief of General Staff, was limited to officers.

The Army reception was generally held in the Officers’ Club (a combination of museum and assembly-room). In 1948, however, which was the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Red Army, it was preceded by a stirring rally at the Bolshoi Theatre. Stalin and his Politburo, together with general officers and other high officials, had taken their places on the stage, which was decorated with flags and Army, Navy

and Air Force banners. The eyes of all the invited diplomats were naturally glued to Stalin's every movement and gesture. As he sat there near to Molotov and Zhdanov beneath the harsh lighting, his appearance was quite distinctive. The persons about him—Malenkov, Kosygin, Beria and Marshal Vassilevsky—also had their personal characteristics and an air of intelligence and energy; but such qualities could be found the world over. Stalin, despite his restrained gestures and the simplicity of his attitude, had something besides—what could only be described as a kind of radiance—by which his immediate neighbours (and in particular Zhdanov) seemed quite eclipsed. Did the source of this radiance lie in his glance, the quiet strength which emanated from his person, or did it in part proceed from the imagination of the observer? However this might be, it appeared to have nothing in common with the morbid fascination exerted by Hitler and Mussolini. They talked incessantly: Stalin spoke sparingly. On that particular day he delivered a few words only: his voice was hollow, did not carry far, and was marked by a strong southern accent. Clearly his fame was not due to this feature! Yet, seeing him in the midst of the others, one felt immediately that he was the leader.

The reception proper, at the Officers' Club, followed a well-established ritual. After the cloak-room came the solemn ascent of a wide staircase, lined by saluting attendants, and then a great yawning emptiness—a large room at the far end of which was the Chief of General Staff. The problem was to cross this space, together with my wife, without appearing embarrassed. A very courteous general escorted us and presented us to our host. We were then claimed by and absorbed into the group of foreign guests who, with a kind of sulky dignity, were holding themselves aloof from the Russians. The Russians, in their turn, made equally little attempt to establish contact.

The buffet, as usual, was very ample and the barriers were soon down. Mixed groups of Russians and foreigners soon

formed to exchange the year's news (for this was not the first time they had met) and the sound of laughter and chattering arose on every side. In one of the Club rooms I was able to admire water-colours painted by an officer's wife, who gave me some account of her artistic interests. Between these walls had once more sprung to life something of the verve, gaiety and slightly "giddy" atmosphere—that surrendering of oneself to the moment—which had characterised old Russia. I felt that the last vestiges of reserve were about to fall—that we were on the point of talking in absolute freedom, without restraint and without prejudice. We exchanged friendly toasts, our faces beamed with genuine pleasure . . . but suddenly there was that sidelong glance, the arrival of some severe-looking person. The faces became masks once more and a sense of coldness spread around.

I tried to recapture this happy atmosphere at another of the groups until the moment came for our leisurely withdrawal; first to the great, empty reception-room, then down the staircase with the saluting figures and finally to where, in the icy wind, our cars stood waiting.

## CHAPTER XIX

### Journey's End

EVENTUALLY the time arrived for me to leave Soviet Russia for good. In common with every other foreigner, I was glad enough to go; one was aware of too much restraint, too many fruitless discussions, too much surveillance; and in oneself too great an impotence against the forces of suspicion, inertia and the mechanisms of a life so different from our own. The people of Russia, however, I could not leave without a feeling of emotion.

When it came to leaving the Union, governmental red tape ran riot. The unfortunate traveller received his ticket at the very last minute, so that he was never quite sure of catching this or that train or plane. The Customs officials were not difficult where ordinary items were concerned, but more suspicious when it was a question of exporting works of art, such as icons, pictures and pre-Revolution literary works. (Soviet treasures were, after all, the property of the State and not to be contaminated by exposure abroad!) When these men came to recently published books, however, they were really on their toes. Being haunted by the possibility of violating the letter or spirit of the régime's policy, they took the most subtle precautions to protect themselves against any possible infringements. The list of books was closely examined and nearly always one or two titles were stroked through—a decision which was plainly arbitrary, since a month later the same books with different owners might be allowed to pass. At times, despite diplomatic passports, even the traveller's personal and accompanied luggage was opened and any books minutely

examined. One would be ready enough to recognise the competence of the examiner where books in Russian were concerned, but the good man claimed an ability to assess books written in French, English and Greek, although he could not have understood the first word of these languages, let alone have read them. In order to demonstrate his vigilance and cultivated mind he might end up by confiscating some light American novel. It was all quite comical—especially for those who were not involved!

People travelling by plane left early in the morning from Vnukovo airport. An Intourist representative saw to the ticket and passport (a practical arrangement) and then the traveller, together with any friends who had come to give him a send-off, proceeded to the waiting-room reserved for important persons. This was furnished with some dreadful blue armchairs and a large table on which stood a carafe of water. On the wall hung a portrait of Stalin and another picture, of a forest interior. The group waited there, talking in low voices and watching the Soviet travellers as they smoked or paced silently up and down. Finally, the porters arrived and the party moved out on to the field. After the passenger-check came the stiff, courteous salute of an M.V.D. officer and the plane was off.

I myself did not leave by plane. My wife and children had gone home several months previously, leaving me alone in the house. During this time I paid my last visits and attended the few remaining receptions.

A leave-taking in Russia has something symbolical and significant about it. The traveller, together with those remaining behind, seats himself near the door and meditates for a while (even nowadays some people say a short prayer for the traveller). Then everyone gets up and the farewells are said.

This tradition was observed in my own case. When the evening came for me to leave, those who had lived beneath my roof gathered together, seemingly as moved as I myself,

for the women had tears in their eyes and the men gazed at me fixedly. I said that, in leaving them, I was leaving men and women whom I had come to know and appreciate and that, through them, I had drawn closer to the people of the country; that in that very moment I realised there existed in their homeland only men of good will, to whom peace on this earth had been given and through whom peace could be assured. I then drove off to the October Station to catch the train for Leningrad.

Since the train left in the evening and the station was in Moscow itself (instead of being, like the "central" airport, twenty miles outside the city), my friends were able to turn up in force. We formed a noisy bunch as we cluttered up the platform, laughing and joking, saying all the things appropriate to such an occasion and getting in the way of the genuine travellers (who, however, passed by without too much grumbling). It was cold and there was still a long time to wait. I paced about, watching the clock furtively. At last the station attendants waved their little discs and I embarked. I was no Englishman or American—my friends did not sing "For he's a jolly good fellow!" I saw the waving hands and then the turning backs of those who, in a greater hurry than the rest, were already making their way towards the exit. . . .

In Leningrad I had to wait a day at the Astoria before taking the night train to Finland. Then came snow, the last glimpse of Soviet soldiers standing in front of their barbed wire, the hospitable territory of Finland, the cleanliness of Helsinki and, finally, Europe itself.

Behind me stretched a veil. I knew there would be no returning. For a moment I had forgotten the M.V.D., my friends and everything which had jolted, but also moved and appealed to my sensibilities. I had received a severe shaking and was going to need a lot of time to recover.

## CHAPTER XX

### Some Conclusions

"**I**T seemed as if they would take no step unless this was ordered or sanctioned in some quarter. The idea made one shiver. . . .

Nothing in the world is more formidable than a headstrong logic: nothing more resembles a permanent conspiracy or loaded firearm. And what further increases one's apprehension is to see these people—self-assured, placid in their obstinacy, grown calm through long inurement, of mild aspect, in disposition gay and pleasant, by nature obliging—filled with dangerous conceptions; living without elation, as if unmoved by scruples or misgivings of any kind.

"As workmen they do not amount to much. They are soft, indolent and, since one does not know how to persuade them, have always to be threatened with blows—in truth, a poor enough approach. But they cost very little and are easy to acquire in large numbers; so one seeks to compensate by quantity for what they lack in individual worth."

(GOBINEAU: *Three Years in Asia*).

Since arriving home I have again read the observations made on Russia by the Marquis de Custine a century ago and also the extract from Gobineau just quoted. I feel a little dazed and am no longer at my ease in this Western world which is absorbing me once more into itself. I no longer understand the people about me; their preoccupations seem futile or ridiculous; they irritate—at times even sicken me. It is as though I were the bearer of some incommunicable message: I am still a foreigner in the midst.

I have reflected upon and attempted to classify the impressions I received in the Soviet Union, so as to arrive at a comprehensive view. What had I, a foreigner, really seen there? What summary could I make of the experiences—of all those apparently unconnected images which had assailed, shocked and perplexed me?

I felt that I was witnessing the progress of two different games which were being played by the Western and the Soviet worlds. More often than not the one world did not understand—nor did it wish to understand—the game of the other, and each claimed that its own game was not only the more interesting but the only acceptable one. One world seemed to be playing an exacting and long-term game, like chess; the other a game such as croquet, frequently interrupted by discussions; and each wished to judge the play of the other by rules which governed its own! Such a situation was totally unproductive; either one had to learn the rules of both games and then choose which to play, or else think up some other game.

What was there about the Soviet side of things which made the greatest impression on me? First, the Soviet people, as I myself had encountered them. For them life in this immense new country (which, in common with all young things, knew that it had all the time in the world before it), seemed overflowing and of a limitless prodigality.

The Soviet citizen thought in terms of the future since he had no past comparable with that of older civilisations. His life was an advance forward and he gave hardly a backward glance. He was a decent man, cast in simple mould: hospitable in his way, unconcerned, possessed of no inner feeling for discipline, yet accepting his fate with an infinite capacity for suffering. Since, like children and young persons, he lacked experience and was at times given to unpremeditated action, his mentors imposed a will, a law and a standard on him; and this was all very convenient, since it permitted him to carry on just living—a pawn to be manipulated by some superior and

dreaded power. Although by nature little disposed to work, he accomplished, albeit slowly, the most difficult and tedious tasks. Sensitive to every outside influence, unmalicious and short-memoried, he experienced by turns a fear of his leaders and a childish enthusiasm for the régime. Since, in discussion, he shifted easily from one position to another (and sometimes opposing) one, it was easy to mistake him for a liar and cheat; in reality he was, so to speak, merely expressing a succession of sincerities.

In a country the size of the Soviet Union, where conditions of life were basically precarious, technical standards low and the national advance several decades behind that of Europe, it was understandable that the gregarious instinct should be well developed. There was no feeling for organisation and no initiative; simply that need (which often characterises the Slav) to believe, to love, to confide himself, and also that hunger for the absolute. By building upon these elements and by adapting himself to such age-old mental characteristics, the Communist had imposed his stamp upon Soviet man and endowed his reasoning and methods of argument with a distinctive character.

What we term a syllogism can be employed as a rhetorical device to bolster up a specific case and to suggest a relationship between a number of unrelated ideas. The same ideas can, a moment later, serve to prove the contrary of what one has just established. Such an array of supposed laws, quibbles and arguments can be made to appear perfectly logical and many a person has been duped and led astray by their infinitely various applications—by this logic which is no logic. A story which circulated Moscow gives a good, if somewhat exaggerated impression of this method of argument.

A Soviet biologist, a disciple of Michurin (it is as well to have good references!) had managed to obtain the services of a flea. During the course of a big cultural lecture he placed the creature upon the outstretched palm of his left hand and said "Jump!" The flea thereupon jumped to the palm of the other hand. The scientist now pulled off the flea's legs, again

placed it upon his left hand and once more ordered it to jump. This time no movement followed. The lecturer turned to the audience, who had been following all this very closely, and said, "This serves to demonstrate, Comrades, that the removal of a flea's legs results in the complete atrophy of his hearing organs."

When any Westerner undertook discussions with Soviet representatives he had to realise once and for all that he was up against powerful opposition; and powerful not only on account of its unpredictable methods of argument, but also by reason of the wealth of documentary information which it commanded.

The Soviet Government compiled and kept up-to-date extraordinarily detailed information on the most varied topics. Everything relevant was noted, classified, indexed and catalogued: cuttings from the foreign press, studies published, remarks made—nothing escaped the vigilance of this all-seeing eye. When the subject concerned was broached at any conference, the Soviet delegate would begin with a long and minutely detailed historical account in which he would trace the matter back to its earliest origins—a procedure which had the effect at one and the same time of disconcerting and informing his opposite number. At each fresh session, with tireless patience, he would begin again, seeking all the time to place his opponent at cross-purposes with something he had said, done or proposed perhaps twenty or thirty years previously. If, in the course of discussion, some new point was raised, he would withdraw, await instructions, and then return to the charge, well supplied with fresh arguments. In the face of this seriousness and persevering obstinacy it was quite impossible to appear brilliant or to extricate oneself (as some would appear to do) by employing subtleties of speech; one just had to be patient, follow the "rhythm" and not accord overmuch weight to the feigned demonstrations of trust and sincerity, any more than to the fits of hostility. One had to seek the chink in the argument, employ it to advantage and also

be equally well informed. It had to be borne in mind that the Soviet side wished to give the appearance of being in the right, even when they were not necessarily so; also that (whatever people may think) a polemical discussion on what appeared to be remote and ancient points of history sometimes had its uses.

A procedure frequently employed by the Russians consisted simply in not replying to some point, despite repeated memoranda. It was rather like punching an eiderdown; in the end one grew tired of it. And that was one up to them!

Any foreigner working in Moscow was capable of witnessing the people and institutions around him. The question was, what assessment had I personally been able to make?

I had gone to the Soviet Union with the intention of finding out something about the Soviet Navy; yet, although I realised that the continent was bounded by three oceans, the Navy itself I had been able to encounter on rare occasions only and even then in a very desultory way. There had been nothing startling until that moment in Siberia when I had been made fully conscious of the Soviet Union as a great naval power, possessing maritime traditions which, although not comparable with those of Great Britain or France, nevertheless permitted her to contemplate the future with some confidence and to build up the oceanic fleets on the lines described by Stalin. So much for the sailor's point of view.

It was, however, a fuller, inside view of the Soviet Union that I wished to obtain. Faced with the rather ordinary scraps of information which he was able to gather, the Westerner found himself in a position similar to that of a biologist who, from a small fragment of bone, has to deduce the structure of the animal to which it belonged; for he also had to discover the law governing a host of tiny, separate elements and from them reconstitute the whole. I myself have done my best to achieve such an integration.

I believe that, generally speaking, one should not attempt to follow the evolution of the Soviet Union on a day-to-day

basis. Her rulers claim to be guided by the laws of historic determinism, which are of long-term operation, and they see to it that the lives of the people are lived out on a scale befitting the Soviet continent. It is impossible to speak of Soviet policy except as implemented over a long series of years and the conception—so dear to Western journalists—of the importance of the present moment of time, means hardly a thing in the Union. It was for this reason that they spoke of a “line;” for, over a period of time, a line (which need not necessarily be a straight one) is subject to movement and may curve variously both forward and backwards. When assessing this element of mobility it was necessary to know not its effect upon one point of the line at any given moment, but the extent of its overall movement. This is an aspect too often overlooked.

As a result of a long and profound study based upon what I had seen, and supported by an examination of basic Soviet texts, I found it possible to discover certain solid elements which admitted of interpretation and understanding; I also took into account the principle characteristics of the Soviet people, who stood revealed in a setting of such apparent disorder that an onlooker who was not prepared to incorporate them in this wider general context might well be baffled by the image they presented. Only after several months, spent removed from disturbing influences, did I feel entitled to attempt a lifting of the veil and to seek beyond these people with whom I had lived so closely. I felt bound to do this if only to reaffirm the primacy of the spirit and to resist falling into a condition of sterile passivity.

In concluding this witness it is not my intention to lift this famous “veil” completely nor yet to pass censure on the laws governing the advance of Sovietism. The most fitting duty I can perform is to give a few pointers—to find a few keys which will permit access to the world of the Soviets.

Everywhere in the Soviet Union one reads: “Under the banner of Lenin and Stalin, forward to Communism!” Even

in the minds of its apostles, Communism was regarded as a still distant stage which was to succeed Socialism. The Soviet Union claimed to be a Socialist State and, from the economic point of view, its accomplishments have been considerable.

As I have already remarked, the most important and most respected concept governing Soviet economy was that of work; whatever was suggested to the contrary by the inertia of a good many people in the Union, work remained something sacred and revered. Regardless of the manner in which it was executed, or to what purposes it was directed by the authorities, "work" constituted an absolute value. Nor has this conception always been something peculiar to socialism, for we ourselves are not so far removed from the time when slackers were universally despised and certainly never regarded as being "smart!"

In a more practical sense work was the means of obtaining the benefits granted by the State to its servants (always provided that they were willing to display passive obedience); for, from the social point of view (because he was needed for the realisation of its projects) the State took good care of the worker. In this field indisputable progress had been made: the citizen was surrounded by constant evidence of care; crèches, child welfare, the Pioneers; education, holidays, medical care—a complete service staffed by devoted people who, through their own solicitude, were ready to demonstrate to the worker the State's concern for his well-being.

The feminine question is one that never fails to arouse argument. The position adopted by the Soviet Union in this respect is well known. I need only add that prostitution there has almost completely disappeared and that, with rare exceptions, the moral tone is remarkably pure.

All this is very well in its way, but we can claim as much for our own social order: Europe also possesses crèches, rest-homes, youth organisations and people devoted and concerned enough to run them. The difference is that all these do not function solely in the name of the State (why, after all, deny to

private organisations their right and ability for good and generous-minded action in the social field?). Women, too, have been emancipated throughout the West and we ourselves may, after all, prefer a conception which views woman not as the equal of man (which implies his rival) but as his complement.

To those who submitted to the discipline of the régime the Soviet Union presented unlimited possibilities: the State cared for their physical needs, encouraged the endeavour of the minds it had fashioned and bestowed very considerable advantages upon those who rendered outstanding service. It was not hard to understand the ardour and enthusiasm of many Soviet citizens and their devotion to a powerful régime which provided such opportunities.

But there was another and debit side to all this. Viewing the question in general terms and ignoring for a moment factors such as bad workmanship, low standards of efficiency and general dilatoriness, of what did this consist?

The Soviet Government made tremendous demands upon its citizens; it undertook their welfare, but on condition that they rendered certain prescribed services. In our country nobody can force us to accept an idea without discussion. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, there was only one employer, one vested interest and one way of thinking. These were all embodied in a single unit: the State. This State, since it imposed a way of life and thought by means of coercion, was a police-State; everyone, whether engaged in the production of power-stations, guns, tanks, planes or even saucepans, shoes and textiles, was subject to its good pleasure.

How could the citizen express an opinion or make his voice heard? Universal suffrage, as conceived in the Soviet Union, was an illusion: the Communist Party controlled everything, brooked no opposition and, in the name of dialectic materialism, exercised a dictatorship of the most arbitrary character. Privileges were certainly conceded to outstanding servants of the régime, but the recipients often paid dearly for

them through not knowing from one moment to the next whether their positions would hold.

The noble impulses and fervour of a whole people were exploited and placed at the exclusive service of a State dictatorship. An appeal was made to initiative, but this had to be canalised—as if the mechanism of a locomotive permitted it to ignore the rails and wander freely over the countryside, when, in reality, it was free to do anything but this! The enthusiasm of the worker was exploited for so long as he himself was capable of giving service. Could the workers truly be considered to own the industrial concerns, the land and the mineral resources of their country? The true landlord—the biggest capitalist in the world—was the Soviet Government itself; for it exercised ownership over both property and persons, leaving the worker in possession of “theoretical property” only—a lean consolation!

The true face of the Soviet Union was hidden by an immense blanket of propaganda and the inhabitants were kept in ignorance of anything existing abroad. The country was a huge barracks, an ant-hill, an entrenched camp, according to how one saw it. It extended over one-sixth of the earth's surface, existed in a state of siege and was engaged in the execution of grandiose plans whose limitations were set by human endurance and the inertia of matter itself. As revealed by these plans, which had undoubtedly provided a driving force behind the Soviet economy, Socialism appeared to consist of stepping up the production of goods and power-stations and increasing both transport facilities and the volume of matter transported; and this, it seemed, would lay the foundation of the citadel in which the power of the State was to dwindle and everybody was to receive according to his needs.

Was this progress? I doubt it. Similar methods were employed by the Ancient Egyptians and the Soviet structure helped one to understand how these people had built the Pyramids. One doubted, however, whether the Kuzbas factories would still be standing in five thousand years' time.

What of the Plans? These were conceptions of tragic and Herculean grandeur; but what a price they exacted in terms of human energy, sacrifice and suffering! Life—the true life of the spirit which exists in every human being—was sorely oppressed thereby.

It became evident to me that Communism, despite its philosophic basis of materialism, was an astounding ideology in the name of which men were banded together for the purposes of work, more work and nothing but work. The terms “dialectic materialism” or “historic determinism” did not change the situation in the slightest. It is true that such an ideology found particularly favourable soil in the Soviet Union; moreover, the importance cannot be over-stressed of that need for the absolute which is so prevalent amongst Russians and which (where the cause seems great enough and particularly where they have come to associate this cause with the national interest) induces in them a messianic fervour and a need to expand and proselytise. Such tendencies have been frequently discernible throughout history, whether crusading beneath the banner of Panslavism or of Rome. The difficulty lay in maintaining this flame.

The power of their conceptions seemed to the Russians great enough to permit a glimpse of that ultimate victory which, although more or less distant and hedged about with obstacles, they yet considered to be certain. The advent of Bolshevism, then, did not imply a renewal of Panslavism, directed only towards Poland and an open sea; nor did it represent merely a change of government or régime. It represented the will to create a new world. This will draws upon an ideology of incomparable power and should provoke Europe to a complete revision of methods (many of which are outdated) and to a wider and more judicious use of those ancient values which have contributed to her greatness.

Were the Communists sincere? Did they believe whole-heartedly in the doctrine they preached? Naturally there were opportunists and a great mass of people who followed without

any particular conviction; but the majority of them must indeed have been sincere, for how could they otherwise have accomplished all the things which so redound to their credit? A few patches of mould might appear upon the bread, but they nonetheless represented the leaven. They raised the people by virtue of new principles and, in their way, were following in the steps of Catherine II, Peter the Great, Cyril and Methodius.

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I have noted some characteristics, have given some "pointers," but as yet have provided no "keys" or reasons why. Yet such reasons are manifold and number amongst them some which are not logically accountable.

For a key to these characteristics I can hardly do better than turn to Dostoevsky (a Russian who understood and felt the heart of his country); to where, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, he recounted "the legend of the Grand Inquisitor."

The story is well known: Jesus returns to earth and is reproached by the Grand Inquisitor for a doctrine which demands from men such a measure of heroism. He, the Grand Inquisitor, accepts responsibility for the conduct of men and for the spiritual well-being of their souls, being himself prepared to shoulder and render account of their sins. In return, during the course of their earthly life, men are to obey him in all things. He takes into his own keeping their good qualities, their faults—all the human worth they represent—in order to exploit these as he sees fit and in the interest of the owners. Man has only to submit to the discipline imposed and to complete the task assigned to him; if he heeds the voice of the Grand Inquisitor, who knows what he is about, he will be relieved of all care, responsibility and the necessity for personal discipline. Briefly, the Grand Inquisitor ends up by condemning Jesus to be burned at the stake, and says, "Know, then, that men have never believed themselves to be as free as at present; and yet their freedom they have humbly laid at our feet. All this has been accomplished by our agency. Is that the freedom you so desired?"

This legend, told by a visionary of genius, reveals in a brief and striking manner, the essence of the regime and its ethics. A thinking minority directed an obedient majority and imposed upon it material and moral standards. The masses, composed of impersonal units with no separate existence or initiative, had but to follow the lead given, and experienced the full weight of a relentless determinism. A mass of common cells worked for the benefit of certain *élite* cells which knew what they wanted (or so believed); and even amongst the *élite* cells there existed a further hierarchy, drawn, in practice, from the Communist Party and inspired by the Marx-Leninism which, according to Lenin, represented a guide for action.

This action was based upon materialism and science (or what in the Soviet Union passed for science) and led to the reign of the machine with all its implications: the utter subjection of the human personality, both on the physical and moral planes, to the false gods of mechanics, turnover, moving-band production, graphs and norms. This machine-empire served only to separate human beings from nature, whence they sprang. It was artificial, false—a compound of factory chimneys, automata and directed leisure; a tyranny wielded by that very matter which was esteemed to have been conquered.

Side by side with this was the operative factor of Russian messianism—or, rather, Communist messianism, for this had taken over from the Russian. The Soviet Union, in common with every other nation, had, in truth, a mission on this earth. But it claimed to play the role of a chosen people who, from within a patiently constructed citadel, the outlines of which were as yet hardly perceptible, sought to bring within the reach of all a paradisiacal life; in that life the needs of everybody were to be met by Communism—that point in infinity to which the nation strained and by the help of which they hoped to establish the ideal state.

The immense size of the Soviet continent itself prompted a messianic vision of the widest and most far-reaching kind and permitted the Russian, convinced that he had all the time in

the world (a permanent Asian characteristic), to give full play to his imagination. As throughout Asia, the spectacle of unbridled waste and sacrifice provoked in him little or no concern, life and death themselves being considered as natural phenomena and unattended by any significance of a spiritual nature.

Enlisted to the cause of this messianic crusade were features similar to those which the Russians themselves criticised in totalitarian states and theocracies; certain of them even appeared to be inspired by those existing in certain great Catholic Orders. There was a rigidity of principles which could never be questioned; yet concerning these principles there were endless discussions (although not with non-believers in Communism, who were considered to be heretics and were treated accordingly). The Party was doctrinally infallible; its decisions irrevocable. The Government maintained a complicated and niggling system for the recording of minor offences and meritorious acts. Any admiration was reserved exclusively for certain important specified persons, heroes of the past, martyrs to the cause and, occasionally, for some hitherto unknown figure especially resurrected and exploited for some present-day propaganda purpose. The anniversary celebrations for such figures were of the kind usually reserved for saints. This was a propaganda blinded by passion: all unorthodox thought was crushed; books were expurgated; the stiff-necked were forced to yield; even the privileged "cells" had to be generally circumspect, since a too rapid rise to fame could herald an equally rapid downfall and any person occupying a prominent position might suddenly be exiled to a place far distant—a fate he would be obliged to accept with the greatest humility. One had to submit to the discipline imposed (even without knowing why the "line" should have taken the sudden "bend") and, if necessary, be prepared to make a public avowal of one's faults. This was self-criticism in the guise of confession. In short, everyone had to demonstrate a faith which was absolute and entailed the integration

of one's whole being in the doctrine and teaching of those who propagated it; a faith in the future triumph of the Communist citadel which, unopposed and commanded by a single authority, was ultimately to cover the entire face of the globe.

The Soviet Union is in a state of development. It is like one of those tremendous rivers in Equatorial Africa which flow leisurely, bordered by impenetrable curtains of forest. Here and there a stray section of water may become detached from the main body, but it matters little. Such a river is like life itself—massive, prodigal, quick to recuperate and insensitive to losses. It forges a way through the jungle; observed, admired, cursed, it sweeps on, threatening to carry all before it. It is impossible to ignore; it is there. Its behaviour presents new and increasingly complex problems and even, more basically, the problem of our very existence.

“Are Soviet people happier or less happy than we, here in France?”

How should I reply to this question, which has been asked so often since my arrival home? We also have our slums and those unfortunate souls whom we hypocritically label “the economically weak”; we have our fair share of blunders and shortcomings; there is poverty, unemployment and many other quite inexcusable features. Our *nouveaux riches* flaunt their wealth with an insolence as detestable, and the freedom upon which we so pride ourselves—where not already suppressed or rendered ineffectual—has in many cases degenerated into mere licence and anarchy.

Yet what a wealth of intelligence has been devoted to the service of the common weal! What faith there is in the majority of our people—perhaps simply faith in good workmanship, but nonetheless, faith, both in man and in the spirit of man!

The governments of man are various: totalitarian, democratic, strong or weak; autocracies; British Parliamentarianism,

or the other kind (choked with useless argument and riddled with anarchy); monarchies, legalistic systems. . . .

The keystone—the basic reality—is man himself: man, assigned to his particular area of the earth's surface and obliged to submit to the conditions of servitude imposed in that area; man, with his good will and his longing to live and work in peace; man, in all his greatness and wretchedness. Man, with his immortal soul.

